AUGUST DERLETH ROBERT BLOCH

NOVEMBER

Weird Tales

15¢

"SPAWN OF THE GREEN ABYSS" by C. HALL THOMPSON

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Thousands of well-groomed men make Listerine Antiseptic a weekly "must"... for a very good reason

THEY know that infectious dandruff is so common, so contagious, so troublesome, and so hard to get rid of . . . and that Listerine Antiseptic and massage is a jim-dandy precaution as well as a splendid twice-a-day treatment.

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Listerine Antiseptic is the same antiseptic that has been famous for more than 60 years in the field of oral hygiene.

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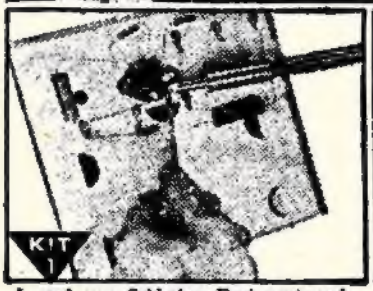
I Send You 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts



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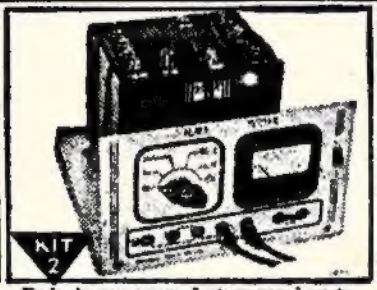

Early in my course I show you how to build this N.R.I. Tester with parts I send. It soon helps you fix neighborhood Radios and earn EXTRA money in spare time.

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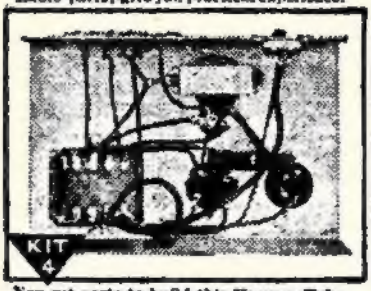

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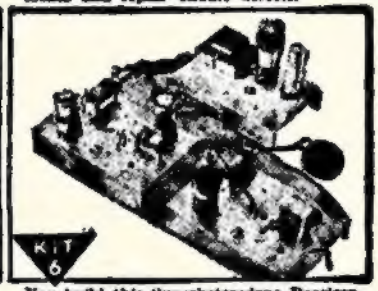

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ALL STORIES NEW — NO REPRINTS

NOVEMBER, 1946 Cover by Boris Dolgov

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Except for personal experiences, the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.* LAMONT BUCHANAN, *Associate Editor.*

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Spawn of the Green Abyss

BY C. HALL THOMPSON

I

I AM not writing this to save my life. When I have set down, in the sanity of plain English, the strange story of Heath House, this manuscript will be sealed in an envelope, to be opened only after my execution. Perhaps then the accounts that have filled the papers during my imprisonment and trial will be more easily understood. Today, in his effective baritone, the attorney-for-the-State told a mixed jury: "This man, Doctor James Arkwright, is the cold-blooded murderer of his wife, Cassandra, and her unborn child. You have seen the evidence, ladies and gentlemen; you have seen the murder gun. The State and the voice of the dead woman demand that this killer pay the extreme penalty." It was a very forceful plea; I could not have asked better. You see, I want to die. That is why this will not be read until the prison medico has pronounced me dead of a broken neck. If it were read while I lived, I might never be granted the release, the nothingness of immediate death; instead, I should spend endless, remembering years in the State Asylum for the Criminally Insane.

Do not misunderstand me. No feeling of remorse prompts me to seek forgetfulness. Should all this happen again—God forbid!—I know I should do the same. I destroyed Cassandra because it was the only thing left to do. Undoubtedly that sounds callous, but when I have told the entire, horrible story, it will seem the inevitable conclusion of a sane man. For, I am sane. There were times when I doubted my senses during those ghastly months on Kalesmouth Strand, but, now, I can only say I am convinced. I know what I saw and heard, and I pray God no other mortal will ever be cursed with such a revelation. There are things beyond the veil of human understanding, strange, antediluvian monstrosities that stalk the shadows, preying on dark, lost minds, waiting at the rim of the Green Abyss to claim their own. These are the things I must escape. And, for the mind that has come to realize their existence, the only avenue of retreat lies through the quiet labyrinths of death.

Haunting, half-facetious dribblings of truth have seeped into the feature stories which various local newspapers ran on the trial. The Kenicott *Examiner* mentions briefly the strange manner in which Lazarus Heath died; a precocious young reporter who visited ancient Heath House in Kalesmouth makes note of the nauseous effluvia that hung like a caul over the staircase, leading to the chamber where I shot my wife; he mentions, too, a trail of dried sea brine which streaked the floor of the entrance-hall, and the carpeting of that same stairway. Those were only thoughtless ripples on the loathsome, scummed surface of abominable truth. They did not touch upon the fluting, hypnotic music that echoed in those decadent halls; they did not dare to dream of the slobbering, gelatinous horror that seethed by night from sightless, watery depths to reclaim its own. These are the things of which only I may speak; the others who witnessed them are mercifully dead.

IN THE night, lying on the hard stickiness of my prison cot, staring into

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

An accursed house, a soul that is no longer one's own—and a boundless doom that comes from the sea. . . .

soundless dark, I sometimes wonder whether I would have gone to Kalesmouth last fall, had I guessed at the horror that awaited me. All and all, I think I would. For, at that time, I should have scoffed at such legends as haunted the antiquated village sprawled on a forlorn peninsula off New Jersey's Northeastern coast. As a medical man, and a mildly successful brain surgeon, I would have set them down to

antique folk-lore whispered by wintry firesides, told in the ghostly tongue of superstitious nonagenarians. Then, too, there were brief moments with Cassandra that were worth any price I had to pay; and, had I not gone to Kalesmouth, I should never have found her.

As things were, I suspected nothing. During that summer, I had been exceptionally active, and, my profession being as exacting as it is, toward the end of September I began to feel the effects. The only answer to the problem of a surgeon's trembling fingers is a complete rest. I do not know what prompted my selection of Kalesmouth; it was not a resort. But, then, I did not want amusement. When I saw that advertisement of a cottage to let in the seclusion of a rocky-coasted seaboard town, it seemed ideal. From childhood I had loved the salt-freshness of the Atlantic. Today, when I think of the greenish waves smashing at the beach, clutching it with watery fingers, I can never repress a shuddering chill.

Kalesmouth is little more than a sprinkling of cottages with a single general-store and a population in the low fifties. The small white houses are scattered along a narrow finger of sand-and-rock land that juts defiantly eastward into the sea. There is water on three sides and a single highway to the mainland. The people talk little to strangers, and one senses an aura of great antiquity in the solitary sun- and sea-swept life they lead. I will not say I noticed any sign of evil in the secluded settlement, but there was an air of tremendous, brooding age and loneliness about the homes and the people alike; the land itself seemed dry and barren, a forgotten relic of earlier, more fruitful days.

But quiet and rest were what I needed after the strenuous turmoil of antiseptic-choked corridors and operating amphitheaters. Certainly, no town could offer better chance for these than did Kalesmouth, redolent as it was of a Victorian era when life moved through leisurely, hidden channels. My cottage was small but comfortable, and Eb Linder, taciturn, wind-dried proprietor of the general-store, helped me lay in a good supply of staple foods. Long, salt-aired days were spent wandering the bleached stretch of a rocky shoreline, and in the evenings I turned to my collection of books. I saw few people and talked with fewer. Once or twice, when we chanced to meet at Linder's store, I spoke to Doctor Henry Joyce Ambler, Kalesmouth's only general practitioner. He was a florid, white-haired individual, full of shop-talk of the sort I was trying to escape. I'm afraid I may have been rather rude to him, for in those first days, I was still over-wrought and in need of relaxation. Gradually, however, I drifted into a soft, thoughtful mood; I became more interested in my surroundings.

I CANNOT be certain when it was that I first noticed the house. Looking back, I should say that, somehow, I must have been vaguely aware of it from the start. The main window of my small sitting-room looked eastward to the aqua-marine expanse of the Atlantic. Situated as it was, at the approximate center of the narrow peninsula of Kalesmouth, my cottage commanded a view of the long earth-finger that pointed so boldly into the sea. Between me and the extreme point of land, a few stray cottages sprawled haphazardly, but there was no sign of habitation within a good half-mile of the land-edge on which the house stood.

The fact that it was a house, set it apart in Kalesmouth. All the others were clapboard bungalows of only one story. In the sea-misted evenings, I was wont to sit for hours by my eastward casement, staring at the vast, gray bulk of it. It was like something from another aeon, a tottering, decayed remnant of the nighted past. Massive and rambling, with countless gables and cupolas, its small-paned, murky windows winking balefully at the setting sun, set as it was on the extreme lip of the land, it seemed somehow more of the cloying sea than of solid soil. An ectoplasmic nimbus clung thickly to battered towers whose boarded embrasures argued desertion. I noticed that the sea-gulls circled the ancient monument warily; birds did not nest in the crumbling age-webbed eaves. Over the whole dream-like vision hung an atmosphere of remoteness that was vaguely tinged with fear and repulsion; it was a thing that whispered of forgotten evils, of lost and

buried blasphemies. The first time I caught myself thinking thus, I laughed away the sensation and decided that my solitary sojourn was beginning to work on my imagination. But, the feeling persisted, and in the end, my curiosity won. I began to ask questions during my infrequent visits to the store.

Silent as Eb Linder habitually was, I sensed an abrupt withdrawal in him when I mentioned the house at land's end. He continued weighing out my rough-cut tobacco, and spoke without looking at me.

"You don't wanta know about Heath House, Doc. Folks hereabouts ain't got nothin' to do with it. . . ."

Sullen warning charged his level tone. I smiled but a small shiver trickled along my neck. I looked across the store to where Doc Ambler stood, his white mane bent intently over one of the latest magazines. His head came up; the usual smile had gone out of opaque eyes.

"Lazarus Heath lives there, Doctor," he murmured. "Very much the recluse."

"Which is jest as well fer us," Linder put in cryptically. Ambler nodded and went back to his reading.

It was at that point that I became aware of the disheveled, weather-beaten creature in the doorway. I had seen Solly-Jo before, wandering the sand-and-stone wastelands of the beach. You will find one such outcast in every small town, I suppose. A slow-witted, distorted brute, with matted blond-gray hair, he combed the shores night and day, ambling aimlessly from spot to spot, sleeping in the lea of some jutting rock. He ate where and as he found food. Always before, the sad, baby-blue eyes turned on me had held a vacant stare, but, now, as Linder gave him his daily free bottle of milk, Solly-Jo was gazing at me with something like sharp understanding in his phlegmatic face. We did not speak further of Heath House, but when I left the store, Solly-Jo slowly followed. He caught up with me and shuffled at my side, smiling vaguely for a time before he spoke.

"You was talkin' about Heath House, wasn't you, Doc?"

I nodded; Solly-Jo chuckled softly.

"I know why you was askin' about it," he said with a knowing leer. "Only you hadn't ought to. Ol' Laz Heath ain't no friend to nobody. Stay clear o' that house. They's things there that ain't right. They's bad things. . . ."

"Just who is Lazarus Heath?" I asked.

"Ol' man . . . real ol'. . . . He got a funny smell about him . . . a dead smell, like dead fish washed up on the beach. . . . Used to be a sailor, but, now, he's too ol'. . . . They's stories about ol' Laz. Him an' that daughter o' his'n. . . ." The lecherous grin returned. "You better fergit about Miss Cassandra, Doc. . . . I know you seen her; that's why you bin askin' about the house. . . . But fergit it. . . . She ain't fer the likes o' you an' me. . . ."

Solly-Jo shook his head slowly, and clucked, sadly.

"No, sir. . . . She's too much like 'er ol' man. Stays away from folks, like him. They live out there alone . . . an', like I say, they's things in Heath House. . . . They's a bad stink, like Ol' Laz has. . . . Nigh onto twenty year ago, Laz was in a shipwreck. Lost fer most two year, then a tramp-steamer found him on a island. . . . He had this little baby girl with him; said she was his daughter; said his wife died in the wreck. . . . Only nobody was ever able to find no passenger listin' fer a Missus Laz Heath. . . . Then, Laz come back here and bought that there ol' place. Even 'fore he come they was talk about bad things in that house. . . . People still talk, only now they whisper, 'case Laz might hear. . . . Take my word, Doc. . . . You steer clear o' pretty Cassandra. . . . She warn't meant fer men like us. . . ."

I can still remember Solly-Jo's simian shadow shuttling off along the craggy, moon-washed strand, voracious tongues of nighted tide lapping at his battered white sneakers. If I had not heard of Cassandra Heath before, now that I had my interest was made the more intense by the drone of the beach-comber's eerie warning still humming in my ears. I chuckled, telling myself it was probably utter nonsense, the maundering phantasms of Solly-Jo's lonely, warped mind. But, my laughter echoed back from a brooding watery wasteland. I recalled the solemn reticence of intelligent, educated Doctor Ambler, the wordless warning of Eb Linder.

Despite such memories I could not get Cassandra Heath off my mind; I promised myself that I would meet her and this legendary father of hers. It seemed easy enough on the face of it; I could pay them a visit, saying I was a new neighbor. Yet, more than once during the ensuing days, I tried to do just that and failed. Roving the dessicated peninsula on a sunny forenoon, I would set out resolutely toward the misty hulk of Heath House, but I could never bring myself to go all the way. The straggling, mossy embattlements seemed too much a part of another world; looking at the house, you got the notion that you could keep walking toward it, yet never reach the crumbling patio, never pass through the ancient, carven door. It is probable that I should never have met Cassandra Heath, hadn't she come to me.

II

EARLY in October, an Indian-Summer storm washed in from the Atlantic. The day had been long and dreary, overhung with humid fog, and, in the late evening, vicious torrents swept inland under a fanfare of thunder. Through streaming casements I could barely discern the gigantic shell of Heath House, looming defiantly above the lashing fury of a hungry sea. I made a log fire and settled into an easy-chair; the subdued soughing of the storm combined with a rather dull analysis of Sigmund Freud must have lulled me into a doze. There was a sensation of spinning lostness; my mind richocheted through the dark well of the rain-whipped night. There was a coldness brushing my face; a nauseous damp clung to my ankles, quelling the roseate warmth of the fireside. Something clicked sharply, and I opened my eyes. I thought I was still dreaming.

The girl stood leaning against the door she had just closed. Dying embers cast a phantasmagoria of lights and shadows on her face and hair. She was slim and well-made; ebony hair flowing to her shoulders gave one a feeling of rich warmth. It matched the steady blackness of extraordinary eyes that protruded ever so slightly. Her skin was deeply tanned. A faint flush in her cheeks and breath coming in quick whispers through full lips seemed to indicate a rather hurried trip. I wondered vaguely at her being quite dry until I realized that the storm had died with the evening. A moment passed, silent, save for the faint dripping of water from the eaves, as the dark eyes met mine.

"Doctor Arkwright?"

The voice, cultured and controlled, like the throaty melody of a cello well played, heightened my illusion of a dream. I rose awkwardly and my book slid to the floor. The girl smiled.

"I'm afraid I must have dozed. . . ."

"My name is Cassandra Heath," the girl said gently. "My father is very ill, Doctor. Could you come with me at once?"

"Well . . . it might be better to get Doctor Ambler, Miss Heath. You see, I'm not a general practitioner. . . ."

"I know; I've read of your work. You're a brain surgeon. . . . That's what my father needs. . . ." The voice trembled slightly; shadowed lids covered the ebony eyes for an instant. Cassandra Heath had admirable control. When she spoke again it was in a tone tinged with defiant pride. "You needn't come if . . . if you don't care to. . . ."

"No. . . . It isn't that at all. . . . Of course, I'll come, Miss Heath. . . ."

My mind sliding backward over the beach-comber's whispered tale, I arranged a small kit with strangely unsteady hands. Cassandra Heath stood silently by the door. I wondered if Solly-Jo's story had been something more than the weird fiction of an overworked imagination. The defiance in the girl's voice argued that the legend of Heath House was known and feared by more than this one insignificant wanderer; so much feared that it might frighten a stranger away.

Even without such a veil of mystery swathing her life, Cassandra Heath would have been a striking person. As it was, I was fascinated.

We had walked some distance before the girl spoke again. The moon had risen and phantom rocks glistened in its watery glow. The ocean pounded choppily on a rain-sodden beach and our feet left moist rubbery prints that disappeared as quickly as they were made. Moving with long,

graceful strides, Cassandra Heath talked in a level monotone.

"I suppose you've heard tales about my father. You can't live in Kalesmouth any length of time without hearing about old Lazarus Heath. . . ." Grim humor touched the warm lips.

"Solly-Jo did a bit of talking," I admitted.

"You mustn't believe everything you hear, Doctor. My father is ill. He has been for some years. We prefer to keep to ourselves at Heath House. When people can't talk to you, they talk about you. . . . They tell stories about father. . . ."

"Miss Heath," I ventured. "Do you think that your father . . ."

"Is insane?" the girl supplied. "Two years ago . . . last year, even, I should have said 'no'. . . . Now, I can't be certain. My father has led a strange life, Doctor . . . a strenuous one. . . . Here of late, he's been given to brooding. He was always moody and quiet, but this is something different. He . . . he's afraid of something, I think. . . . Then, too, there are the disappearances. . . ."

"Disappearances?"

"He's taken to wandering off at night. . . . Four times in the last couple of months I searched the whole length of the Strand and couldn't find him. . . ."

"Maybe, he'd gone to the mainland. . . ."

"I think not; someone would have seen him. No . . . he went somewhere . . . somewhere much farther away. . . ." For the first, a note of puzzled fear crept into Cassandra Heath's voice. ". . . Much farther. . . ." She seemed to come back with an effort. "He did that tonight, Doctor. Just before the storm broke. . . . I . . . I found him later . . . hours later . . . wandering in a small cove beyond the house. He was talking strangely . . . and singing. . . . A funny little tune. He's in his room, now . . . still talking . . . still singing that song. . . ."

Onyx eyes flashed up to meet mine; in that brief moonlit instant, I saw all the doubtful terror, the puzzled anxiety that Cassandra Heath would not admit, even to herself. I had no time to question her further, to attempt to link together her last broken phrases so that I could guess at the real meaning that lay hidden in them. Kalesmouth Strand had suddenly narrowed, and now, on either side of us, midnight ocean licked possessively at the land. A torturous path, tangled with sea brambles and rocks, snaked to the shadow-choked veranda of Heath House. Weather-wasted planks groaned in protest under unaccustomed footsteps.

AT a gentle pressure of Cassandra's hand the ponderous mahogany door swung back soundlessly. Even before I stepped into the candle-lit, gloom-encrusted hallway, I could smell it—that loathsome, clinging effluvium of rotting marine flesh of which Solly-Jo had muttered. It swirled sickeningly in the clammy atmosphere of a foyer that was like the dusty nave of some forgotten cathedral, rising along lushly paneled walls to the sightless dark far above. A wide, twisting staircase wound upward to some higher labyrinth, and as I followed Cassandra Heath up stairs whose ancient gray carpet was worn thin by the tread of forgotten feet, the fetor became ever more powerful, more noisome.

Through dream-like corridors, I followed the fitful glow of the candelabrum the girl carried. Another door opened, then closed behind me. I stood in a chamber that seemed drawn from the dark maw of lost aeons. Tremendous oaken furniture dwarfed the figure sprawled limply on a dias-raised bed, and, though the small-paned casements stood wide, chilling sea-fog swirling through them into the room, the stench was overpowering. Cassandra set the candelabrum on an antique cabinet-de-nuit; an eerie luster flickered across Lazarus Heath's wasted visage.

During his professional lifetime, a brain specialist is called upon to diagnose countless horrible cases, yet they are the horrors of the nighted mind, or of blindness caused by a tumor. They are medical things, and can be understood. You cannot diagnose a fetid malignancy that goes beyond medical knowledge, rooting itself in the black soil of ancient hells. There was nothing medical knowledge could do for Lazarus Heath.

Pushing back revulsion, I made a thorough examination. The massive body, little more than skin and bones, now, gave off a reeling aura of putrefaction, and yet there were no sores. Sopping clothes that hung in tatters, were tangled with dull-green seaweed, stained with ocean salt. But, it was the

face that caught and held my attention. The skin, taut and dry, was the color of aged jade, covered with minute, glistening scales. Staring into the candlelight, Lazarus Heath's pale eyes bulged horribly, and as the great, bony head lolled spasmodically from side to side, I made out two faint bluish streaks, about four inches in length, running along each side of the scaly neck, just below the jawline. The lines pulsed thickly with the air-sucking motions of his salt-parched lips. Watery incantations bubbled upward into the dank stillness.

"They call. . . . They call for Lazarus Heath. . . . Zoth Syra bewails her lost one; she bids me come home. You hear? The Great Ones of The Green Abyss hail me! I come, O, beauteous Zoth Syra! Your lost one returneth, O, Weeping Goddess of the Green Nothingness. . . !"

Sudden power energized the lax skeleton, so that I had no easy time in holding him to the bed. Pallid eyes stared beyond this world, and Lazarus Heath's cracked lips warped in a hideous smile. Then, as suddenly, he was calm; the ponderous cranium cocked pathetically to one side, in a grotesque listening attitude.

"You hear?" the hollow voice gurgled. "She sings to me! The Song of Zoth Syra!" Inane laughter tittered weakly. Heath's rasping voice dribbled into a strangely haunting threnody, a song that at once attracted and repelled with its subtly evil intonations.

"Zoth Syra calleth him who knows the
Green Abyss;
Men of salt and weed are lovers all
To the Goddess of the Green and Swirling
Void—
Come away to Zoth Syra! Come away!"

"Father!"

Cassandra's voice was scarcely more than a distraught gasp, but at the sound of it, the odious, hypnotic smile froze on Heath's parchment-pale face, then, slowly, decomposed into a twisted mask of sick horror. For the first time something like terrified reason seeped into those oddly protuberant eyes.

"Cassie! Cassandra!" Heath stared about him frantically like a child lost in the dark; once again he tried to raise himself, but, before I could restrain him, crumpled backward into a voiceless coma.

HALF an hour later, standing in the shadows of the decaying patio, looking eastward to the moon-scorched desert of the Atlantic, I told Cassandra that there was nothing wrong with her father's mind. Perhaps I should have phrased it more coldly and added: "Nothing that medical science can cure." But, sensing the free, vibrant life that flowed in the girl's body and brain, I could not bring myself to tell her that I thought Lazarus Heath was going mad. Too, I was not at all sure of my own diagnosis.

I told Cassandra that I wanted time to observe her father more closely, and she seemed greatly relieved to know that I would consider the old man's case. For myself, I confess I could not have done otherwise. Despite the malignant shadow that shrouded Heath House in ageless mystery, I knew that I would come back again and again, not only because I was curious about the singular aspects that accomplished Heath's apparent twilight madness, but because, as I left her that night, Cassandra held out her hand, and I took it in mine. It was a simple, friendly gesture, and we both smiled. From that moment on, I was completely, irrevocably in love with Cassandra Heath.

Looking backward, it seems to me that our brief moment of happiness was like some minor miracle, rising as it did through a choking miasma of brooding evil, to touch, if only for an instant, a clean, sunlit world known only to lovers. Somehow, we managed to transcend the haunting omnipresent ghost of Lazarus Heath's illness. It is true that the old man returned to normalcy during that final fortnight of his troubled existence, and for a time Cassandra could forget the strange enigma of her father's insane babblings, and those sudden, inexplicable disappearances. Being a medical man, however, I never really forgot. Often, during those last two weeks, I talked with Lazarus Heath; he submitted to questioning and examination quite calmly. As to the peculiar condition of his skin, and the odd lines on his throat, he professed ignorance, and the once or twice I mentioned Zoth Syra, he went gloomily reticent on me. He

said the name meant nothing to him, yet, never before or since have I seen a man so patently weighted down by some blasphemous, heart-gnawing secret, as was Lazarus Heath. He ate little and spent his days and nights slumped in a crotchety chair, staring into the bluish mist of the small cove beyond Heath House.

Cassandra needed forgetfulness; as much as I could, I got her away from the sullen loneliness of the antedeluvian manse at land's end. With the passage of days, she relaxed and became her own charming self, a side of her nature to which, I think, even she might have been a stranger. For the foul legends that trailed after Lazarus Heath had cut his daughter off from companionship and the clear, untarnished joys of the extrovert.

WE SPENT the long sunny days together on the beach; Cassandra was like an imprisoned nymph suddenly set free. She swam with the grace of one born to the water, and ran the length of arid sand with the lightness of a child, her wonderful hair flowing wildly in the sea breeze. A man cannot see such youth and beauty and remain untouched. My Cassandra had not only these; too, there was an air of quiet wisdom about her, that was somehow wistful and sad. She was prodigiously well-read, and told me her father had educated her. Sometimes she spoke of long, lonely childhood years, when she lived only in the pages of the countless books in Lazarus Heath's library.

I had seen that small, book-cluttered room with its musty, rich bindings; the old man spent much time there. It is strange how so comfortable and common-place a nook could shelter such a vile, inhuman secret through the years. Had I learned that secret sooner, Cassandra would be alive today.

III

LAZARUS HEATH died the night I proposed to his daughter. Up to that time he had improved fairly well, until, at moments, watching the new vivacity that had touched Cassandra, he seemed almost normally pleased. I believe the old man conceived a liking for me, because I had given Cassie something; I had given her my friendship and my love, and his awful legend had not frightened them away.

The night I asked Cassandra to marry me, it was balmy and quiet, and we had been walking along Kalesmouth Strand, watching the silver ribbons of the moon on the Atlantic. I remember, I halted rather abruptly, mumbling that I had something "to ask her," and then Cassandra smiled and kissed me. Her lips were warm and full of promise.

"The answer is 'yes', darling," she murmured.

We laughed, then, a soft, rich laughter whose gentle, love-haunted echoes I shall never forget. Clinging together we ran along the moonlit sand. That day, a last leaf of Indian Summer had fluttered across the peninsula, and a wintry sea was already lapping hungrily at the land. Cassie chattered brightly about how happy her father would be for us, but somehow, as we neared the sepulchral tenebrosity of Heath House, a hollowness crept into her laughter. It was as though she already sensed the horrible discovery that lay before us.

There was no answer when Cassandra called out in the hollow well of the foyer. We began our search for Lazarus Heath calmly enough, but, now, the laughter had gone altogether. He was not in the dusty sanctuary of his library; the linen of his tremendous oaken bed flapped in the wind that brushed through casements thrown wide to the rapidly chilling night. The look of utter terror in Cassandra's eyes told me we were reasoning along the same lines.

It did not take long to reach the strange little cove in the shadow of Heath House. A cold, dream-like quality saturated every corner of that miniature beach, hid from sight on all sides save the East, where the predatory mutter of the sea seemed dangerously near. But you can awaken from the insanity of a dream; there was no such escape from the terrible reality of that night.

At the center of the cove, edging into the water, stood four weirdly hewn pillars, placed so that each made the corner of a crude square; in the moonglow they had the aspect of sinister mediaeval altars of sacrifice, reared to noxious, unnameable gods. Sprawled at the center of the evil square,

face-down in a foot of lapping sea-water, lay the lifeless body of Lazarus Heath.

I cannot rightly remember how I got the brine-tangled corpse into the house. There is a searing picture of Cassandra's face, frozen with sick grief; and another, of myself, alone in that fetid bed-chamber, performing an autopsy, listening to Cassie's distant, pitiful sobs the whole time. That night, I got down on my knees and prayed to God that the things I had discovered could not be so. Yet, I had seen with my own eyes the increased scaliness of Heath's face, the horrible enlargement of his eyes. I knew that my first guess had been wrong; Lazarus Heath had not drowned. For those hellish lines on his throat had become long, oozing slits, like nothing but the slobbering gills of a tremendous fish! I had a sick feeling that Heath's weird mumblings might not have been the gibberish of a madman, but the delirium of one who had learned things no mortal was ever meant to know.

We buried him in a sealed pine casket. If the morticians from the mainland noted the strange condition of the corpse, they gave no sign. With them it was a business; Death had myriad forms, each as cold and unquestionable as the last. With Cassandra, however, I had to be more careful. I knew the terrible effect that nauseous, bloated visage would have upon her. I told her the autopsy had been rather disfiguring, that it would be better if she did not see her father. She obeyed with the simple acquiescence of a child who is lost and lonely, and in need of guidance. Once, she roused from a cold, apathetic state of shock to tell me that Heath had always wanted to be buried in the cove. It rained on the day of interment; icy needles pelted forlornly on the unpainted wood, as two uneasy negroes lowered Lazarus Heath to his final rest. A timid mainland pastor intoned the Lord's Prayer in a sad, squeaky voice. That night, there was nothing but the rain, and the horrible stillness of forsaken Heath House. Sparse flowers wilted on the fresh clay mound in the cove; a clammy tide fingered slowly in, lapping at the edge of Lazarus Heath's grave.

I HAD to get Cassandra away; watching pent-up doubt and fear turn her lovely face into an expressionless mask, I knew she must be freed of the cloak of black uncertainty that enveloped Heath House. We talked through most of that rain-washed lonely night, and for the first time in my medical career, I told a lie. Could I have seen the sick terror in her eyes, and spoken words that might turn that fear into madness?

When I performed that autopsy, I found no cause for Lazarus Heath's death. There was no water in his lungs; every organ was in excellent condition. But, I told Cassie that the old man died of a heart attack. I told her I was certain that her father had been perfectly sane. Even as I spoke, new color flushed her cheeks; an expression of indescribable relief lit ebony eyes. Cassandra could not know that the old man's sanity was more to be feared than his insanity. An unstable brain could answer for wild babblings, for ungodly melodies, but what could account for the terrible, concreteness of that scaly, fish-like corpse? Wrack my brain as I did, I could find no explanation in the accepted medical sense; and, I dared not go beyond that, into the malevolent lore of forgotten ages, to discover what blasphemous horror had destroyed Lazarus Heath. I preferred to try to forget—to go on with Cassandra, covering this nightmare with endless moments of normal, happy living.

Many times during the next few months, I thought I had succeeded. A week after the solitary funeral on Kalesmouth Strand, Cassie and I were married by a pleasant, apoplectic justice-of-the-peace. We had our wedding supper in the quiet luxury of one of the better hotels, and for the first time since her father's death, Cassandra smiled. The city proved to be good for her. Deliberately, I made those early days a scintillating round of gaiety. I introduced Cassie to the bright lights and the brassy, arrogant joys of city life. We were exquisitely happy. Her laughter was a wonderful, warm pool of summer sun, swirling briefly in that winter city, and then, suddenly, freezing over.

I cannot recall just when I first noticed the difference in Cassandra. Perhaps I had been too happy myself to realize what was happening to her. The breezy tinsel of the city had sparkled very brightly for Cassie, but, it had burned itself out in the effort.

After a time, it lost its fascination. In the beginning, I tried to tell myself that I was imagining things, but, gradually, I felt the happy freedom slipping away from us. Cassandra's smiles grew scarser by the day; there was an infinitely sad far-away look that kept stealing into her eyes at the most unexpected moments. I began to imagine that she had grown pale. I watched her more closely than ever. An end of it came one evening late in August.

I found Cassandra alone on the night-cooled terrace of our apartment, staring Eastward across the summer-choked city. When I touched her shoulders she gave a little start, then smiled sadly.

"Can you smell it, darling?" she murmured wistfully, after a moment.

"What?"

"The sea. . . ."

In that moment, I think I had a sudden vision of the scabrous puffed face I had fought desperately to forget, and, floating evilly in the night air, I sensed a whisp of the decayed effluvia of Heath House. I struggled to keep my voice steady.

"What're you getting at, Cassie?"

Cassandra smiled again.

"Can't fool my doctor, can I?" Her voice was soft. "Darling. . . . Would you mind terribly if we went back . . . to Kalesmouth . . . the Heath House?"

Strangely enough, all I felt for an instant was a sensation of relief. I had been waiting for that question all along; I was almost glad the waiting was over. I took Cassandra into my arms and kissed the tip of her nose. I wanted to sound careless and bright, I told her, if she really wanted to go back, there was nothing I would like better. Cassie smiled, nestling her head against my shoulder. As we stood there, looking into the darkness above the winking lights of the buildings, a cold shudder ran through me. I wanted to say it was wrong; we couldn't go back. I said nothing. Quietly, hypnotic and shrill, a familiar, odious threnody chortled inland from the distant Atlantic. ". . . lovers all to the Goddess of the Green and Swirling Void. . . . Come away, to Zoth Syra! Come away!" I wondered if Cassandra could hear it. I prayed that she couldn't.

I am not certain of what I expected upon our return to Heath House. I could not forget the puling, nauseous horrors we had left behind; the stench of a scaly corpse seemed never to leave my nostrils. I remember my hands sweating on the wheel as I tooled our car across the long bridge that connected Kalesmouth Strand with the mainland; early-morning fog seemed to close in behind us, shutting us off from reality. The baleful finger of the solitary macadam road that led to Heath House pointed with terrible certainty to the steely expanse of the sea.

However, the change in Cassandra heartened me, dispelling somewhat my uneasy premonitions. Already, her complexion had returned to its former warmth and beauty; her laughter rippled softly at some weak joke I had made, and the ebony cloak of her hair was rich and alive in the sea breeze. Our homecoming was much more pleasant and prosaic than I had dared hope it would be; it gave no trembling portent of the icy, sea-brined evil that was to stalk our future hours in the malevolent house. Only the sea chuckled expectantly in the lonely cove near Lazarus Heath's tomb.

It is impossible to trace the stages by which I became jealous of Heath House; there was something subtle and cruel about the change that overtook me after the first days and nights on the barren point of land that meant so much to Cassandra. At the start, I managed to convince myself that I was happy—happy because Cassie seemed to be so, for the first time in months. I even felt something like an uneasy affection for the old place, because it made Cassandra what I wanted her to be—full of a rich, wild life, touched with the mysterious charm that had first attracted me.

We began to refurnish and remodel the house; the mundane clang of workmen's saws and hammers, the earthly smell of turpentine and white lead, seemed to breathe a freshness into the foul, antiquated halls and chambers. I told myself it was just another charming old house where people could be happy if only they tried hard enough; but, all the time, a new whispering voice within me, clamored for attention. I knew I was losing Cassandra to a past of which I had not been a part; Heath House was reclaiming her.

Cassandra herself seemed to notice no

change in our relationship; she was gentle and full of a soft tenderness toward me, and still, I had the terrible feeling that a barrier was rising between us, day by day, second by second. Cassie took to a habit that roused uneasy memories in me; any hour of the day or night, she would be seized by an urge to walk quickly, unseeing, along the lashing edge of the sea. They were not the leisurely wanderings we had known in the past; it was as though Cassandra were trying to get, somewhere, trying, unconsciously, to reach something.

Once or twice I mentioned the habit, but she only smiled remotely and said there was no harm in a stroll by the seaside, was there? I had no answer. I could not tell her of the cold unprofessional, unreasoning fear that had begun to haunt me. We went on with our repairs of Heath House, and gradually, brightened by chintzes and restored tapestries, filled with usable period furniture, it became livable. We had finished all of it, save the library; it was our plan to make this into a study, in which I might work on the book I planned to do on brain surgery. We never remodeled the library. I saw the inside of that abhorred chamber only once after the night Cassandra locked the panelled door and made me promise not to ask for the key. I wish I had never seen it at all.

THAT evening a bulwark of leaden clouds swung ponderously inland from the sea; a chilled late-October wind sifted beneath the imminent storm, swirling the sand in tiny puffs along Kalesmouth beach. By the tang of salt in the air, and the reticent anger of the surf, the Northeast was going to blow us a big one. I quickened my pace, walking home from the store; a dirth of incident had lulled me into uncertain forgetfulness, and, at that moment, I was almost pleased with the prospect of the evening ahead of me. Early in the afternoon, I had told Cassie tonight might be as good a time as any to go over the library, gleaning the useless chaff from the hit-and-miss collection that had been her father's. Now, with a storm brewing, the idea of going through the books and effects of my mysterious father-in-law fascinated me. The biting wind and glowering ceiling of sky seemed to me a final atmospheric touch. I wondered if the spell of Heath House had begun to claim me as well.

The moment I saw her, I knew that something had gone wrong. There was a strange, jade-like pallor under Cassandra's skin, and her eyes wouldn't meet mine. Once or twice during our quiet dinner, she laughed, but the laughter echoed hollowly. Thunder had begun to shudder malignantly far out at sea. A finger of lightning shattered the darkness and our storage-battery lights pulsed anxiously. I saw Cassandra start and tip over her wine glass; the port spread like an oozing bloodstain on the Madeira linen. I looked at my plate, pretending not to notice her extraordinary nervousness.

"I've been looking forward to tonight," I said.

"Looking forward, darling?" That false-brittle smile was in Cassandra's voice.

"Yes . . . I've always wanted to go through those fabulous books. . . ."

The clatter of metal against china brought me about with a start. Cassie had dropped her fork from fingers that seemed suddenly paralyzed. She stared at me with unseeing eyes and one slim hand raised in a futile gesture of protest. Her colorless lips trembled.

"No! You mustn't. . . ." A gnawing fear sprang into the emptiness of her gaze; she made as if to rise, and, in an instant, all life seemed to flood from her body. She slid soundlessly to the floor.

What I did then was done with the unconscious habit of a medical man; training overshadowed the sick, watery weakness of my legs. Somehow, I got Cassandra to our bed chamber on the second floor. Her exquisite face had a whiteness that whispered of death, but breath came in uneasy, whimpering shudders. I chafed her wrists, an agony of doubt whirling in my brain. Thunder slithered across the sky, crashing insanely over Heath House; the storm broke. Dark eyes were suddenly wide in Cassie's pale face. Her hand clutched mine so violently that her nails bit into the flesh.

"You can't go in there. . . . Nobody can go in there, ever again. You hear? Nobody . . . ever again. . . !"

"It's all right, darling. Try to relax. Tell me what's frightened you. . . ."

Her head shook dully.

"I can't. . . . I can never tell you. You've

got to trust me. You can't ever go into that room; don't ever try. I've locked the door. You mustn't ask me for the key. Please! Promise me you won't! . . . Please!"

IV

I PROMISED.

I heard myself saying the words over and over in a thick monotone. They seemed not to reach her. Her lips hung loosely, fear twisting the beauty from her face, leaving nothing but unreasoning hysteria. She went on pleading, unable to hear my reassurances. The sedative I gave her was not a weak one. My hands shook as I prepared it. I had to work in the dark. Our storage batteries had given out. There was nothing but pitch-blackness and the babbling fury of the elements, chewing at Heath House mercilessly. Perhaps it was only my nerves; once I could have sworn that there, in the pulsing gloom, an overpowering stench, an effluvium that was almost tangible, brushed against me.

At length, Cassandra's whimpering died away; she sank into a deep fitful sleep. Lightning crashed maniacal brightness into the room; for an instant it washed Cassie's face and throat. There was a delicate, gold-dipped chain around her neck; on it she had strung the key to the library.

You cannot always give reason to your actions. That night I could have stolen the key. I could have gone down the hall through the darkness, and into the damnable chamber that held a secret ungodly enough to press my wife to the brink of madness. If I had, things might have worked out differently. Maybe I was a coward, afraid of the antediluvian horror that awaited me beyond the massive carven door. Maybe I did not want to know the truth. I told myself I had made a promise to Cassandra. I left the key where it was, and stumbled downstairs in the stygian blackness. Screeching banshees of rain begged entrance at the streaming casements; a fire burned fitfully in the sitting room grate. I found a decanter of rum in the cabinet by the window. I do not remember how long I paced the floor, torturing myself with doubt and fear, trying to believe that Cassie was sane, wondering what puling monstrosity lay hidden in Lazarus Heath's book-room. I sank into an armchair and swallowed another mouthful of rum; the storm seemed to have drawn far away from me. The rum bottle tinkled against the glass as I poured; I drank. I lay my head back. Lightning pulsed through my optic nerves, but sound was only a blurred pungent, rum-soaked whirlpool. Then, there was only darkness. I slept.

It was the dull angry thumping that woke me; consciousness seeped through the ragged slit it made in the forgetfulness of sleep. I got unsteadily to my feet and stood in the center of the room until the whirling darkness righted itself. Something new had sifted into the room; the fire still sputtered doggedly, and yet, there was a dampness it could not dispell. A chilled whisper of sea-air sighed along the floor. I went into the foyer; coldness washed over me in a tidal wave. The front door flapped back and forth on its heavy hinges; rain pelted in a drooling puddle in the hallway. I swore and slammed the door, throwing the dead-latch. Then, I stood very still. Cassie! The name blazed like a neon sign in my brain. I think I knew in that moment that she was gone.

THE search was something careening from a dream gone mad, a terrifying nightmare in which the geometry has gone all wrong. I wanted to scream or cry, but dry fear clamped my throat. Everything twisted crazily in my head; Cassie's empty bed, the heart-like drumming of the open front door; myself, stumbling through the brutal onslaught of a northeaster, calling her name again and again, finally reaching Eb Linder's place and getting half the people of the Strand out of sane beds to wander the hellish night in search of Cassandra. It must have gone on for hours; I cannot remember except in vague snatches. There was a stolid, gray-faced fisherman who muttered something about the sea claiming its own. At dream-like intervals Solly-Jo wandered in and out of the rain. Eb Linder's sister made coffee for me, and got me to change my drenched clothes. She kept telling me it would be all right. The men, with Doctor Ambler leading them, had been over every inch of the Strand and found nothing. Miss Linder kept right on saying it would work out all

right. At 3:30 a kid came in, dripping with rain. He said they'd found Cassandra in the cove behind Heath House.

She wasn't dead. When I reached the house, Ambler had her in bed, covered with numberless blankets. Her clothes lay in a sopping lump on the floor. Ambler poured me a drink, and I think I cried. He waited until I had got it out of my system. I kept watching to see if Cassie was breathing; she looked pale and dead.

"I can't figure it," Ambler said quietly, after a while. "We went over that cove so many times, I'd swear it was impossible for anything or anyone to be there. Then, Linder came across her, lying at the water's edge, on her father's grave. She was all . . . all matted with seaweed . . . I . . ." He stared at me. The numbing horror that froze my insides must have shown in my eyes. "What's the matter, man!"

"Seaweed!" I choked.

I didn't hear any more of what he said. I went to the bed and looked at Cassandra closely for the first time. Her skin shone faintly in the uncertain substitute of candlelight—as though it were covered with flaky, gossamer scales! On either side of her throat, I made out two pale, bluish streaks. My head spun; I felt as if I were going to be sick. Rising insidiously from the mucky pile of clothing on the floor, a vile, decadent stench flooded the chamber. From a tremendous distance, a voice whispered gently: "I come, O, Yoth Kala! Your bride has heard your call! Through night and storm, I come!" The voice was Cassandra's.

"It's nothing to worry about, man," Ambler was saying kindly. "Just a case of exposure. . . . She'll be all right. . . ."

"Yes," I nodded dully. "She'll be all right. . . ."

THE last hope of happiness drained from me; I felt weak and lost in a plummeting void of unspeakable horror. There were times, in the days that followed, when I had the sensation of living in an alien, frightening world, a world in which lay hidden the blasphemous secrets of death and the grave, a world that sang with the strange, blood-craving incantations of lost and murderous cults. There was nothing human in the terror that held me prisoner. You can fight evil if it is concrete. This was something that could not be touched or seen, yet, something always at my heels, its stinking, flesh-rotting breath burning against my neck.

I hid my doubts from Cassandra, trying to be cheerful. She convalesced slowly, under Ambler's care. For days at a time, she would seem to be herself; she would smile and talk of how it would be when she was well again. And, then, abruptly, her mood would swerve into one of black secrecy that made her eyes blank and hostile. She whimpered in her sleep, and took to humming the weird threnody that had been Lazarus Heath's swan song.

More and more the feeling that I had lost her possessed me.

Gradually, her body grew strong again. She was able to be up and about, to wander the Strand on sunny days, her face silent and secretive, her eyes shutting me out when I tried to reach her. A sick, uneasy spell pervaded Heath House. Cassandra began to be nervous whenever I was near her; she resented my intrusion on her solitary walks. It was as though she looked upon me as a jailer, and on Heath House as a prison from which she must somehow escape. She spoke coldly and shuttered when I touched her. But, at rare moments, some of her old gentleness would return; you could see puzzlement and fear in her face. She would touch my hand and kiss me. She would tell me I was wonderfully kind. For an instant we were together again, and then, without warning, the barrier chilled between us. Cassandra drew away; the fear and bewilderment froze to what could only be suspicion and loathing.

Winter crept inland on icy cat's paws; brittle tendrils of frosted air swung sharply along the peninsula. Even the afternoon sun had withdrawn behind a caul of December chill. The Atlantic whipped with predatory regularity at the deserted sands, scant yards from Heath House. I tried to work on my book, but it was no good. The severe cold had made it necessary for Cassandra to remain indoors; she paced the endless, labyrinthian halls with the cold patience of a caged jaguar. She talked little and spent most of her time seated before the ceiling-high casement that looked eastward to the undulating iron casket of the

ocean. At times, she made a feeble pretense of reading, but, always, her eyes sought that melancholy wasteland, as if she expected to see something, or someone. My head ached constantly, the tempestuous, evil problem of Cassie throbbing at my temples with hellish persistence.

Once I spoke to Ambler about her moods; he talked of complexes and Freud; it was reassuring to listen to his calm, reasoning approach to the subject, but even as he spoke, I knew there was something torturing Cassie that no psychoanalyst could hope to explain. She was possessed by an entity whose subtle, odious influence was stronger than any fantastic twist of the mind. Time and again, I paced before the forbidding oaken library door, trying to find the courage to break my promise to Cassandra. Once, she caught me there. She did not speak, but only stared at me with a hatred so intense that it was frightening. After that, is seemed to me, she was doubly watchful of the brass key that hung on the fragile web of her necklace.

Her silent hostility spread itself like an undulant pool through the brittle newness of Heath House; it wiped away everything we had tried to make of the place, and left it as it had been before, a clammy, sickening shell of the past, a past that wanted no part of the present, that would brook no intrusion of light or hope. Cassandra was a creature of that past.

DOCTOR Ambler continued to make routine monthly calls. To all outward appearances, Cassandra was no longer ill, yet, a certain, unhealthy pallor of skin persisted; at moments, when she was without make-up, the faintly luminous prominence of the delicate scales terrorized me. If she noticed them, Cassandra said nothing. The long, discolored streaks on her throat had become barely discernible, but I could not keep my eyes from them. Ambler made no comment on these noxious oddities; he went his earthy, country-doctor's way. I think he never had the slightest inkling of the true horror that engulfed the house he visited so regularly. Certainly, he had no notion of the evil that lay hidden in the news he told me that evening late in December.

The day hadn't been at all good; mid-winter sleet lanced across a dense fog that came slithering and crying against the windows of Heath House. I had spent most of the time alone, making a sham at reading, wandering restlessly from room to room, staring blindly from one fog-curtained casement after another. During those last days, I had grown to anticipate a storm with a terrible, choking fear, for Cassandra's moods seemed more sullen and morbid as the easterly wind lashed angry rain or snow about the tiny cove behind the house. She would stand for hours gazing at the water-eaten mound that housed a thing that I could recall only with a tremor of disgust, a wave of nausea that balled itself like lead in the pit of my stomach. I had seen her doing that all that morning; she muttered something about how lonely he must be out there, and then walked slowly down the hall. I heard her door-lock click behind her. I had given up trying to understand her oblique remarks, brief whispers that seemed not meant for me, but rather, vague thoughts, personal and awesome, spoken aloud only by accident.

When Ambler had completed his examination in the privacy of Cassandra's chamber, he plodded heavily down the twisting staircase. I offered him a drink, muttering something about its being a raw night. It was only a pretense of civility with me, until, in the firelight of the sitting room, I saw the new expression that had crept into Ambler's eyes. I had seen many expressions there, after such sessions with Cassandra; expressions of doubt or bewilderment, or of professional satisfaction at her apparent recovery, but, now, there was something almost like pleasure in those soft gray eyes. I poured him a glass of sherry. He gulped it and winked.

"You've been wise people, you and your wife, Doctor," he said, after a pause. The eyes were actually twinkling.

"Wise?" His good humor had begun to irritate me.

"Of course! Nothing could have been more intelligent. . . . I don't like to seem personal, but after all, it's been fairly obvious that you and Cassandra . . . well, something's come between you. . . . But, now, this. . . . Certainly, a child is just the thing to bring you together again. . . . It'll make

all the difference in the world in this gloomy old place. . . ."

I suppose I hadn't really been listening to him. I remember packing my pipe, absently, and scratching a match on the box. It made a tiny, lost noise in the shadowy bleakness of the room. Then, he made that crack about a child, and I just stood there, staring at him, the match flickering in my hand. There was nothing but a hollow numbness in me; afterward, I found a scorched scar on the skin of my thumb and forefinger.

I realized dully that Ambler was chuckling; his hand was on my shoulder.

"Well, don't look so confused, old man," he said heartily. "I guess Cassandra wanted to surprise you herself, and now I've gone and spoiled it for her by blurting it out. . . ."

"She never said a word. . . ."

Ambler laughed and I think I managed a watery grin; he gave me that line about the husband always being the last to know. We had another glass of sherry. I tried to act natural. The wine spread hazily through my puzzlement; a warmth swirled in my head, as I saw Ambler to the door, a vague, unreasonable anger. I was hurt at the silent wall Cassandra had erected between us; it seemed impossible, almost inhuman, that she could have known such a thing, and deliberately kept it hidden from me.

When Ambler had disappeared into the maw of the storm, I bolted the door. Our lights had given out again, and I walked unsteadily. The anger throbbed in my temples now; it kept time with the flickering of the candelabra light as I slowly climbed the winding staircase to Cassandra's room.

V

THE door was locked. My shadow cast a dark blot against its panels, a ghost that wavered drunkenly into the half-light. My hand was perspiring; the candelabrum kept slipping in my grasp. I knocked, listening to the leaden echo it made in the subterranean catacombs of the house. There was no answer. I called:

"Cassie!" My tongue felt thick and dry. I waited.

"I'm lying down, darling. I've a headache. . . ." Cassie's voice was brittly light, controlled with an effort.

"I want to talk to you." Anger cut through my tone.

For a long moment, there was nothing but the spectral whisper of the waxed candlewicks as they sputtered anxiously, then, a murmur of footsteps beyond, and the key turned in its socket. I let myself in, closing the door behind me.

Cassandra was standing by the fireplace; the instant I saw her, anger ebbed from my mind. There was something terribly small and frightened about her lovely, small body in the gossamer softness of a negligee. I set the candelabrum on a table and went to her; my hands trembled at the warmth of her shoulders. She did not draw away; she did not move at all.

"Ambler told me about the baby," I said gently.

It was then that she turned; she was smiling, and in that moment, all the falseness had gone out of her face. A quiet warmth touched it. She traced my lips with her fingertips.

"I wanted to tell you myself. . . ."

I did not realize, then, that the taut sham was still in her voice. I kissed her. I told her it was wonderful. I said all the foolish things a man has a right to say at such a time. And, then, suddenly as I had begun, I stopped. Her mask had slipped; the warm tenderness was gone. A wall of nothingness blotted out the walls of her eyes. Cassandra twisted violently from me.

"It's no good," she whispered hoarsely. "It's no good!"

"Cassie. . . . I don't understand. . . . I . . ."

She spun to face me; blurred stains of tears streaked the sallowness of her cheeks. In the jaundiced candleglow, her eyes were abnormally bright.

"Can't you see? Do you have to be told?" Trembling lips twisted in a coarse sneer. Her small even teeth seemed somehow vicious. "You're not wanted here! Just go away and let me be! I never want to see you again!" The hard grin widened and unstable laughter bubbled hysterically in her throat. "Your child! Do you think I'd bear your child! Can't you see I've changed? Don't you know you've lost me . . . that I belong to him now . . . ever since that night

I went to the cove . . . to the Abyss. . . . I'll always belong to him. . . . Always! Always! The bride of Yoth Kala. . . !"

The maniacal laughter cracked off as I gripped her shoulders; my fingers chewed into her flesh. I could feel her breath against my face, hot and sobbing.

"Cut it out!" I snapped. "Stop it, Cassie!"

She stood there for an eternity, staring at me; the mood whirled and twisted and childlike, bewildered fear was in her eyes again. She began to cry, her slight frame shuddering pitifully.

"It's true, I tell you," she gasped. "It's not your child. You don't believe me . . . you think I'm crazy. . . . You needn't believe me. . . . Just go away . . . before he comes for me. . . . He said he would come. . . . I don't want him to hurt you. . . . I don't want them to make you like me . . . like my father. . . ." She was babbling senselessly, the words tumbling from her lips. ". . . Yoth Kala will come. . . . I hear his voice . . . he sings. . . . You hear? . . . Calling me . . . his bride . . . the mother of his child. . . . I come, O, husband of the Green Void. . . . I come. . . ."

IT wasn't easy to hold her. I still have four parallel scars on my right cheek where her nails bit in frantically. She twisted with a strength that was nothing human, her lips muttering, her high, cracked voice shrilling that loathsome melody that meant death and horror and endless unrest to any who heard it. Finally, I won. Quite suddenly, she stopped struggling, she peered childishly into the darkness beyond us, her head cocked pathetically to one side, listening. She took an uncertain step toward the window before she fell. There was no sound save the rustle of her negligee as she crumpled at my feet. A thread of crawling spidery fog snaked in through the half-open casement, lingering like a shroud over her body. The stench was something from the bottomless watery depths of the sepulchre, a vile effluvium that was somehow the embodiment of every malevolent terror that stalked Heath House.

Cassandra and I were shadows playing a part against a papier-mache background in a scene from the opiate-deep nightmares of Poe. I did things without stopping to wonder why. I can recall carrying her to the bed, and touching her pulse with fingers so numbed by horror that they could scarcely detect the fluttering heart-beat beneath them.

That was the night I came to an end of it. You can take just so much; you can go on hoping things will change, that you will awaken from this monstrous dream of falling through a void of unutterable terror. Then, you hit bottom. Staring at the chalky stillness of my wife's face, lost in the whiteness of the pillows, I knew I would have to break through. If I was to save her at all, I had to get to the bottom, I had to take this noisome fear in my hands and tear it out by the roots. I had to open the cancerous sore of the secret that ate at Cassandra's mind, the secret that lay buried in Lazarus Heath's book-room.

I was quite calm about it. When her breathing had become safe, I took the key gently from the necklace. With something that was more instinct than purpose, I got my revolver from the night-table drawer; it was fully loaded. I locked Cassandra in and went down the hall to the library. The gun made me feel better. It was something solid and sane to hold onto. A month later, the prosecution used the gun as exhibit "A"; they called it the murder weapon!

What I found beyond the massive, chiseled portal was a thing that laughed at the puny, human bravery of guns; a malignant, flowering evil that spawned itself in the pen-scrawled words of a man long-since food for the gnawing maggots of an unspeakable hell. As I pushed open the door, staring blindly into the pit of darkness beyond, I almost wished for a stinking, flesh-born terror with which I could clash; an evil that lived and breathed, and could bleed and die. I found nothing but a dusty, dry-rot smelling chamber, that had been too long without air and sunlight. A mouldering, half-burned candle stood at the edge of what Lazarus Heath had used as a writing-table; I held a match to it.

A butterfly of flame sputtered to life, throwing mammoth shadows along the crumbling plaster walls, casting an unwanted eye of light on the endless shelves of books long used to the privacy of night, untouched by curious hands. I wandered aimlessly about the high, barren room, gazing upon

titles so antiquated, so much a part of a past beyond remembrance, beyond life and death, that I should have sworn it was a library straight from the flaming abyss of Hell. They were books not meant for mortal eyes, tales told by cults that sank into oblivion before time was measured, cast out from earth, trailing the ruins of their hideous, blood-thirsting rites behind them. Here and there, more sane, understandable volumes came to view. There was a priceless collection of sea lore, and in one spider-webbed corner, I found a yellowed, thumbed copy of "The Odyssey"; one section had been underscored, its battered pages mute testimony of endless reading and rereading. It was the passage describing the escape of Odysius from the syrens. God knows, Lazarus Heath had reason to be fascinated by it.

THE shrill tumult of Cassandra's wild babbling still thundered softly in my brain. I stood very still, thinking, "This is the room." The root of it had to be tangled in the tomb-like dust of this shadowy chamber. But, where? my mind echoed. Where? My wanderings had brought me to the worm-eaten throne-chair behind Heath's writing-table. The light of the candle did a danse macabre as I sank heavy into the seat; it washed the black marble table-top with a flood of icy yellowness. Then, I saw the diary. I gave it a casual, irritated glance, and then, as the frenzied scrawl impressed itself upon my consciousness, I leaned closer. Faint gold-washed letters glittered brassily in the semi-darkness. "Lazarus Heath—His Book."

It may have been only the figment of a sick, overwrought imagination; I don't know. I know that I felt it there within me, the instant I touched the book. I felt the evil that sighed through Heath House, suddenly come to life, as I thumbed nervously through the water-stained pages of Lazarus Heath's diary. The demented tittering of the storm rose from a whisper to the howl of a rabid dog baying at the moon. Sleet lashed at high casement windows and the silken portieres rustled anxiously. Even before I began to read that incredible, unholy record, I knew I held the root in my hands.

There was nothing sinister in the first entry. It was made in the steady, squarish script of a self-educated seaman, and dated February 21st, 192—. The words were sure and sane, with no hint of the hell-penned horror that lay in the final pages of the book.

Lazarus Heath had shipped out as First Mate aboard the freighter *Macedonia*, bound Southeast for Africa. It was as simple and prosaic as that. For pages there was nothing but the easy, satisfied chatting of a sea-faring man setting down, for his own amusement, the record of an interesting but mundane voyage. The first leg of the journey had gone well; even the weather had been with the *Macedonia*. The crew was competent and not too quarrelsome, and already looking forward to a "time" in the African coast-towns. Then, somewhere in the Southern Atlantic, they ran into the fog.

At first, Lazarus Heath made only passing mention of it; although it had come upon them unexpectedly and was intensely thick and disconcerting, it was judged that they would sail on through it on instruments without too much difficulty. There was a controlled, sensible attitude in Heath's script at this point; he was writing for himself the things he had told his men. At the close of the entry he wrote, as though loathe to admit it, even to himself: "There is a certain uneasiness among the men; it is not good for the nerves, this endless, blinding fog. . . ." The writing trailed off with the first whisper of the uncertainty that was laying siege to Lazarus Heath's mind.

The next entry was made four days later in a dashing, cold hand. It was short and bewildered. "Still this damnable fog, and that is not the worst of it. The instruments have begun to act queerly. We must go on as best we can and trust in the Almighty. Men very jumpy. . . ." And, on the night of the same day, the controlled hand had wavered perceptibly as it scribbled: "Instruments gone dead. What in God's name does it mean?" The story continued.

The coming of the voices was not sudden It began with Dyke. Lazarus Heath knew little about the gangling, blond-bearded kid called Alan Dyke. He had signed on in New York as a fireman. A quiet, uneasy individual, he spent most of his leisure with books. He effected the bilge-water lingo of the sea, but underneath, he was only a

kid, and he was scared. It began, according to Heath, when the engines went dead. They had expected that for what seemed a century. The *Macedonia* couldn't go on plowing in blind circles forever; the fuel gave out. The hell-fire in the bowels of Heath's ship guttered and died; there was only an echoing ghost of the roar that had choked the engine room.

IT WAS too quiet. An unholy, nerve-rending silence enveloped the becalmed *Macedonia*. After a time, the men even gave up talking, as if the very echo of their voices, hollow and dead in the smothering fog, terrified them.

Dyke was on the foredeck when he heard the voices. Heath, standing beside him, had sensed an abrupt new tautness in the bony, coltish frame. Dyke's adolescent face strained to one side, marble-blue eyes gazing blindly into the mist; he listened. His words came to Lazarus Heath as though they had been separated by some yawning, fog-choked abyss.

"You hear them? The voices? I can hear them; they're calling us. . . . The syrens are chanting the melodies of watery death. . . . Zoth Syra calleth. . . ." The voice was no longer Dyke's. It was light and cloying, possessed of a malignant beauty. Men froze and stared; they seemed not to hear Heath's sharp commands. "I heard nothing," Heath wrote that night. "Still, the sounds must have been there. Dyke must have been listening to something; he and the others. . . . But, I mustn't believe these whispered legends of sea-syrens. Someone must hold this God-forsaken crew together . . . if only I have the strength . . . if only I can keep from hearing the voices. . . ." That was the prayer of Lazarus Heath, the night the *Macedonia* ran aground and sank off the ghostly shores of a lost, unchartered island.

Little space separated the next entry from those last frantic words, scribbled unevenly across a water-streaked, foul-smelling page of the diary, yet, reading on, I had the sensation of an endless spinning through some dark, watery nothingness. I lived the nightmare of which Lazarus Heath wrote with the calm sadness of a completely sane man.

The end of the *Macedonia* had been sudden and strange. By the hour, they had known it must be noon in that outer world with which they had lost all hope of contact. Their own existence had become a perpetual fog-swarming night; the monstrous ticking of the ship's clocks only taunted them. The bells of the *Macedonia* ricocheted mockingly into the boundless darkness of the mist. They had been chiming when the end came.

Lazarus Heath had spent most of his life on the water; he had survived more than one shipwreck. Panic and the smashing fury of the sea were nothing new to him. It was the quiet that terrified the *Macedonia*'s First Mate. The crew seemed not to understand; his lashing, bitter orders fell on deafened ears. The swirling Atlantic sucked thirstily at their feet and they did not move. Officers and men alike, they stood or sat in a speechless, apathetic stupor, unmindful of the death that swirled and lapped on every side. Each face held the same wrapt, hypnotized expression. One would have said they were listening. . . .

Heath steeled himself. He mustn't listen. He mustn't let himself hear what they could hear. He wanted to live. He stalked the length of the bridge angrily, bawling harsh commands. Only the fog and the sea listened and echoed. The *Macedonia* groaned mournfully and listed to port; water, thick and brine-tangled, flooded her hold. No one moved. She was going fast. He had to do something, make them hear him, bring them back to life. . . .

Inky wetness washed against him, whirling him blindly in a stinking bottomless pit. His lungs would burst . . . they must. . . . Air! And, then, he was on the surface. In the near-distance of the fog, the gray mass of his ship loomed balefully. It foundered and up-ended; there were no cries of terror or pain . . . only cold, death-spawned silence. The *Macedonia* went down. There was nothing but a dull phosphorescence on the surface, and the frozen, black expanse of sea and fog.

VI

HEATH was never quite certain about the island. It seemed probable that the *Macedonia* had run aground on the pinpoint of land that rose like a monstrous

medusa from the mauve-green depths of the sea, yet Heath had never been aware of the existence of such an island; it was marked on none of the charts drawn by human hands. At a moment's notice, it had seemed to rear itself into the cotton-wool fog off the port bow of the ship. The water lapping at its fungus-clotted shores gurgled insanely as it swallowed the last of the *Macedonia*.

Oil-stained brine tangled Lazarus Heath's limbs; swimming was next to impossible. He never knew how long he was lost in the whirling eddies that licked about the island. It seemed an eternity. In the limitless, time-killing darkness of the fog, he struggled hopelessly, until finally, his feet touched bottom. He slithered ashore, lashed on by the incoming tide. Salt burned his lips and eyes; he was between choking and crying. In the lea of a gigantic finger of rock, he toppled to his knees, and sank forward, face-down, into a thoughtless stupor. . . .

The fog never lifted. When Heath's mind crawled upward from the soundless depths of unconsciousness, he had no way of knowing how long he had lain, senseless, with the mossy, damp soil of the island clinging to him as if it had some power of physical possessiveness. He rolled over on his back, his head throbbing and dazed. He was breathing more easily, now; some of the weary tautness had gone out of his limbs. Wincing at the effort, he dragged himself to a standing position. He leaned against that shadowy hardness of the rock. His hand came away coated with a malodorous, verdant slime. Heath wiped the hand clean, feeling suddenly ill at the cold dampness that crushed in on him. He couldn't be sick; do something . . . something to keep his mind busy. Dragging one foot heavily after the other, he began to explore the island.

When he tried to set down the incommunicable, barren loneliness of that lost outpost, Lazarus Heath failed. His pen stammered, searching for the right words, and finally admitted that the tone of the place was indescribable. He wandered endlessly through the cloying blueness of the mist, and found nothing that offered hope of any sort. The entire, clammy surface of the island seemed to be covered with the same nauseous green slime his hand had encountered on the coastal rock. It sucked hungrily at his feet with each step he took. It oozed from the trunks and gnarled, lifeless limbs of the barren trees that were scattered sparsely inland. The smooth, mucous-like scum coated the jutting rock formations wherever they sprang into spectral being, making them gleam with a malevolent phosphorescence. Lazarus Heath wrote one fearful sentence, the ghastly import of which he was not to guess until an age of horror had passed. "One gets the singular, frightening impression that this island has been a part of the ocean depths for more years than man can count, and, somehow, has risen to cause the tragedy of the *Macedonia* and claim its only survivor . . . myself. . . ." This was written just before he began to hear the voices.

PERHAPS, before, even up to the last nightmarish moment, when he saw the crew of the *Macedonia* drawn, hypnotized and unresisting, into the slavering maw of the sea, Lazarus Heath had not believed in the voices. A great many explanations of that frozen, listening attitude which held the men to their death, may have flashed like a wild phantasmagoria through his mind. Most of all, I think, he believed the officers and men alike seized by some loathsome mass madness. The sounds to which they "listened" so intently must be the figment of some malady of the mind. But, there, in the clammy mists of the lost, slime-coated island, he suddenly knew that the voices were very real.

They were not ordinary sounds. They were soft, cloying cadences that caught and held consciousness in a spider-web of evil beauty. They seemed uttered by countless alien tongues echoing across a vast and fearful chasm, and yet, as Heath stumbled on in search of them, he would have sworn that their source must be, there, just the other side of that next slimy knoll. He did not think of why he must find them; he only knew that this vile harmony had suddenly become very clear and understandable in his mind. "Come away!" the voices chanted, with the sound of myriad Gehennan lutes. "Come away to your bride, Zoth Syra! Come

away . . . away . . . to the Queen of the Green Abyss. . . ."

"I staggered blindly onward," Heath wrote in his diary. (The words themselves staggered crazily across the water-ruined pages, a mute reflection of the precipitous, hellish compulsion of his quest for the voices.) "I knew not where I was going, nor why. I fell time and again; my hands and knees bled with scrambling among the slippery, treacherous rocks. I came to the beach. Somehow the fog there seemed to lift, growing less dense, and I found myself on the brink of the ocean. I knew I must stop, or drown, but my legs continued to pump with piston-like persistence. The voices were nearer, now; they held a malevolent beauty more compelling than the sounds that echo through narcotic dreams. Panic-stricken, I felt the icy water rising about my body, and still I kept moving out to sea. Brine swelled about my chest. The voices chanted mad cacophonies in my ears; wild, discordant, irresistible. The water reached my neck, my mouth . . . and then, my head was covered. . . .

"And, now the maddest thing of all. Submerged, I continued to walk, to breathe, slowly, easily, not through nose or mouth, but through a pair of gills in my throat! I strode onward through the swirling, opalescent depths, ever toward the howling, evilly-joyful singing . . . toward my bride, Zoth Syra!"

Between these frenzied, staggering words and the next and final entry, there is a gap of several blank, brine-yellowed pages. But for this, one might have guessed through desperate wishful thinking, that the final episodes of that hideous record were dreamed of whole cloth—the fanatical ravings of a mind lost beyond rescue. No such guess can be hazarded when you have seen that last entry. It is dated almost twenty years later, in Kalesmouth. The writing is spidery and precise; the words have the cold, terrifying ring of unquestionable, blasphemous truth. Lazarus Heath set down those final sentences with a calm, almost grim determination. The very bareness of the clipped emotionless style he used has a numbing quality. God knows I would rather have died than believe this unholy tale, but there was no choice.

EVEN after twenty years, Heath could only hint at the monstrous dream which followed his descent into what he called "The Empire of the Green Abyss." His tight, controlled words whisper of a world unknown to mortals, a submarine, slime-choked empire of strange geometrical dimensions, a city whose architecture was somehow "all wrong." Entering it, Lazarus Heath was seized with an unutterable nausea, a repulsion that made him want to return, to go back somehow, and die as normal men would in such circumstances. But, he went on. In some inexplicable manner, he had become a part of this world of loathsome watery putrescence. He became one with the creatures who were the subjects of Zoth Syra, Empress of the Abyss.

OBVIOUSLY, the pen faltered, the words would not come, but lay stagnant, and unspeakable, in Heath's mind when he tried to "describe" these creatures. He could no more draw a picture of them than he could explain the evil charm they held for him—a charm embodied in the chanting, ungodly thing they called Zoth Syra. Lazarus Heath was at once repelled and terribly, irresistibly drawn to this Queen who had chosen him for her lover. In trembling half-scrawls, he hints at the monstrous, primitive rites that were part of their betrothal ceremony. And of himself he writes with frightening simplicity: "I was helpless. I was part of those decadent blasphemies and knew it, yet had not the will to resist. I wanted only to go on listening to that hellish, sweet voice which belonged to my Queen. . . ."

There was no time; there was nothing but an endless, bitter-sweet madness, from which he had not the will to escape. He became to the creatures of the Abyss, Yoth Zara, the Chosen One. And reigning beside the indescribably evil beauty, Zoth Syra, he became conscious of a ceaseless murmuring of restless voices that echoed sibilantly in the song of his Queen. Perhaps it was then that Heath pieced together his explanation of that hideously magnificent underworld. I do not know. But it was the whispering of the voices that made him uneasy, that sent his mind struggling upward from the Abyss, groping blindly toward the light of normalcy. It was the

murmured legends that made possible his final escape. The horror of them gave him a strength he needed; they deafened his ears to the song of Zoth Syra. And, when the Empress of the Abyss bore Lazarus Heath a child in his image, he fled with the baby, wildly, insanely, rising through the undulant shadows of a mad dream.

More than a year and a half after the disappearance of the *Macedonia*, Lazarus Heath was found, more dead than alive, on an uncharted island in the Atlantic. Some aboard the rescue ship wondered about the strange blue marks on Heath's throat; they asked each other how a man could survive for nearly twenty months when there was no sign of shelter or vegetation on the island. They questioned him about the baby girl who was rescued along with him. Heath said her name was Cassandra.

VII

"I Lazarus John Heath, being of sound, and sane body and mind, and under the influence of no thing or man, natural or otherwise, do this day set my hand in protestation of the truth of what I have written above. My story is not a dream; it happened, and I pray to the Almighty it may never happen again. At first glance, it will have, for the reader, all the earmarks of drunken fantasy, but upon closer consideration of the facts, upon a study of the lore of the sea, I feel certain that another decision will be reached.

"In the ancient books, men have written of a race of Syrens, monstrous beauties of the seas, who lured men to death and worse with their strange, irresistible chanting. This race, say the recorders, was banished from the earth for its evil practice of black magic; the Syrens were turned into the rocky, treacherous shoals of the ocean; turned into stone. . . .

"The whispered legends of the Abyss have another tale to tell. Yes, they murmur. Their race was cast out as men recorded, but only condemned to the deep they once controlled; so that, sullen and alone, they begat the People of the Abyss, a race of creatures that lurks on the edge of time, safe in the maw of the green ocean, until the moment comes when they shall again proclaim themselves and retake the world from which they were banished countless ages ago. I have been one of them; through me they hoped to strike, I think. I was to be their contact with this world we know. I have heard their unsatisfied whimperings; they chafe at the bit for release. And I say beware. They have claimed me. True, I escaped, but even yet, I am of them. In the end, they shall reclaim me . . . but, not alive, if I can help it. All these haunted years since my escape from the Abyss, I have heard their songs, their endless pagan chanting. So far, I have resisted, but I grow ever weaker. Some day, they will win. But, it is not this that terrifies me; I know I must die as a traitor to their cause. My only fear is that somehow, some day, they will realize that with me in my flight, I took the daughter of Zoth Syra. I pray God they will never reclaim her . . . for Cassandra is one of them, just as I. . . ."

THE last words of Lazarus Heath's horrible testament wavered frailly across the page, as if the controlled hand of the writer had grown too weak to go on. The ink was blurred in spots by vague, circular stains that might have been made by raindrops, or the impotent tears of a lost, frightened old man.

With numbed fingers I closed that book of the damned. I sank back against the cold unfriendliness of the throne chair, and shut my eyes. I could feel beads of icy perspiration forming at the base of my skull and trickling down the back of my neck. Not only my hands were numb, my brain was working with the dreamy sluggishness of a somnambulist. Curiously evil visions danced across the shadowy, decaying bindings of books on the far wall. I do not know how long I sat there. The candle guttered and died. I sat on, hemmed in by the writhing ghosts that complete darkness set loose again in the chamber where Heath had written his hateful confession.

Outside, the storm raged maniacally, seething through the forgotten, rat-pirated tunnels under Heath House. Vaguely, I thought that somehow with each passing instant, the sea and the wind had become more ferocious, more predatory, as though

lashed on to devastating fury by some internal, supernatural disturbance. Then, slowly, through the screaming lunacy of the storm, I became aware of another sound. It was a high, soft threnody that was of the wind and lightning, yet a song in itself, a chorus of myriad voices that echoed from beyond life and death, that whispered hauntingly, evilly, of the secrets of the unknown. The song of the Syrens, my mind muttered. Yes, their song. But, for whom? They had Lazarus Heath, now; they must be calling another. . . .

Even before I heard Cassandra's voice, I was out of the chair, stumbling toward the door. Then, the first anguished wail of her ghastly litany froze my senses. For an incalculable moment, I could only stand and listen. That unbearable throbbing was not my heart; it was Cassandra's frail hands pounding madly on her chamber door for release.

And always, steadily, her cry rose, shrilling through the shadow-crawling halls of Heath House, an obscene, awesome chant, at once wheedling, beguiling, and commanding. Slowly, painfully, I made out the words.

"I have heard you call, O, Yoth Kala, my betrothed! I have seen the spirits of the Abyss grown wild as presage of your coming; their rejoicing has set loose the sea that is their empire; it echoes in the thunder, the black wind and lightning! Come then, my husband and father of my child! Claim your bride! Come to me through the cove of Yoth Zara, my father! I wait! Come . . . Come!"

THE silence in which that last unholy plea died away was an eternity of horror for me, yet it must have endured only an instant. It was a strange, pregnant silence, fraught with impending terror. I realized dully, that those countless voices that had risen a moment before above the howling wind, had just as suddenly been quieted. Now, in their stead, another voice, single and terrifying in the very loneliness of its sound, rose from a murmur to a sharp nasal chant that sliced through the violence of the storm as if it were a mere unruly zephyr. Someone, something, very near, yet outside, was calling Cassandra's name. The cove, my mind repeated mechanically. Come to me through the cove of Yoth Zara, my father. . . .

I staggered through the blinding darkness toward the single tall window of Heath's study. I felt the skin of my ankle torn as I stumbled over some vague, edged object. I swore and righted myself. My hand caught at the drape, and its dusty velvet strength supported me. I peered through the smeary, leaded panes, into the streaming maw of the storm.

"Cassandra!" that hell-spawned voice echoed. "I come, O, Cassandra my bride. . . ."

I do not know how I looked standing there, that night, in the evil-sodden gloom, but, I know what I saw. Perhaps, in the end, I shall be no more successful at putting the essential, blasphemous horror of that vision into words, than was Lazarus Heath. But, I must try. If I can transcribe only one grain of the actual loathsomeness of the Abyss-born creature called Yoth Kala, perhaps, then, men will know why I destroyed Cassandra. . . .

The flash of lightning that rent the maddened heavens in that moment, was nothing ordinary. It was like a sudden noon-day sun at midnight, throwing into relief the hideous, turbulent cove where Lazarus Heath died. The cold stone of the sacrificial pillars cast gargoylesque shadows on the slimy sand; a torrent of cackling sea crashed inland, and drowned them for an instant, then, suddenly, receded, and the Thing was there. I do not remember what wild conjectures twisted through my fear-tortured brain in the moment. Perhaps I thought I had gone mad; perhaps I told myself I was letting my imagination run away with me. But, I knew I wasn't.

I cannot say the Thing in the cove walked; it moved inland rapidly, but with a seemingly gradual, amoebic motion. It expanded and ebbed, gelatinous tendrils creeping over the sand of the cove, spreading like a stain of ink, or black, poisonous blood. I saw no distinct form. I was conscious only of a monstrous, jelly-like mound, black and glistening with a slime-coated, nauseous putrescence. The Thing slobbered onward to Heath House, covering ground with frightening speed. And from this hellish creature, through the whip-lash of the storm,

shrilled the high, hypnotic voice of Yoth Kala, calling his bride. . . .

The period of befogged waiting came to an abrupt end. I knew, quite suddenly, that the time for thinking and rational disbelief had run out. It was no longer a matter of guessing and wondering at the mad writings of Lazarus Heath. I, myself, had seen them come to foul, soulless life. I had witnessed the evil of the Abyss incarnate, creeping relentlessly toward its goal—coming to claim Cassandra!

EVEN as I watched, the foetid Thing disappeared around the dim corner of Heath House. I moved more surely, now, with a strange, icy calm. For, now, I had at least one thing for which to be grateful. The evil that I fought had taken on concrete form; I was no longer fighting shadows. Clutching the cool butt of the revolver in my pocket, I went out into the murky shadows of the hallway. I moved quietly, scarcely daring to breathe. I must reach Cassandra before It did. I must keep her from this creature of lost and carrion ages. And, always, as I walked, the discordant, shrill threnody of Yoth Kala sliced into my consciousness. The pounding on Cassandra's door became more frantic by the second. Her voice rose wildly, calling to the Thing risen from the briny tomb of the sea.

I had almost reached her door, when I stopped. A sudden, whirling vertigo seized my brain; I clutched at the balustrade for support. Rising from the well of the foyer, a reeking effluvia reached out to every corner of the shadow-ridden house. I will not say I actually heard movement; it was simply a soft, hissing sound, as of oily water eating at the rotton pilings of a river dock. I stared down the long staircase, trying to focus my eyes, and then, abruptly, the Thing was there, moving quickly up the stairs. I saw it clearly for the first time.

No one whose mind is cramped by cut-and-dried conceptions of form and the three known dimensions, can possibly sense the vague, hideous shapelessness of that creature of the Abyss. The form it possessed cannot be drawn in units of height or thickness or density. It seemed to undulate, varying by the second, rising gelatinously to a height of perhaps ten feet, and then, subsiding, swelling, spreading slimy tentacles forward. The whole of the rubbery outer skin was coated with a foul ichor, a tarry stickiness that seemed secreted from monstrous, leathery pores. I think it was this bluish slime that set loose the rancid stench that grew more overpowering with each moment, with each slithering inch of its progress up the staircase.

At the approximate center of this putrid, blue-black mass, a raw, slobbering hole, which seemed to be a rudimentary mouth, sucked in and out with obscene rhythm. It was from this opening in the reticulated, reptilian hide that the cloying, mucous-choked chant of Yoth Kala emanated. Actually, there was no face, but, nearly a foot above the wound-like mouth, there was a single, serpentine tentacle that writhed from side to side, sensing, rather than seeing, looking like some flesh-made periscope shot up from hell. At the end of the tentacle, I made out what might have been an eye—the squamous, dusty, expressionless orb of a snake. And, now, as the Thing crawled upward, the eye-tentacle suddenly grew rigid, turning toward me. For a second, the huge gelatinous form hesitated, then moved forward again, this time directly for me.

Mechanically, sick with the putrid vileness of the odor the Thing cast off, I staggered backward, away from on-coming horror. The eye-tentacle wavered and followed me. The forerunning cilia of black, tarry stickiness flowed across the hall, only a few feet from me. The stench was unbearable. It seemed to me that the pagan song of Yoth Kala had taken on a high, evilly-humorous note. The slobbering mouth-hole spread in what could only be a hideous, anticipatory grin.

NOW, my back was against the wall; I could still hear Cassandra thumping on the panels of her door, crying her invitation to this loathsome lover of hers, but I was no longer thinking of her. I could think only of the long, jelly-like feeler, sent out from the black, viscid mass, curling slowly about my waist, crushing. Perhaps, I screamed or swore; I do not know. I remember plunging my hand into pocket and squeezing the trigger of that revolver. There was a smell of seared cloth as the bullet burnt through my coat, and then, sharply, a

cry, almost human, of furious pain. A slitted, ugly wound opened in the feeler, and bluish, stinking slime spewed over my hand and waist; this was the foul, putrid blood of the creature of the Abyss! A thick, nauseous ichor that spurted like oil from the bullet wound. The feeler uncoiled in a tremendous reflex of agony, and I stumbled away, down the hall, fumbling in my pocket for the key to Cassandra's door. I slammed the heavy portal behind me, and leaned against it, sobbing hysterically.

The first thing I became conscious of was the sudden silence; it fell like a spidery caul over Heath House. I realized dully that, for a moment, Yoth Kala's song had been stopped.

Beyond the door, there was a vague, liquid rustling, then a tense, waiting noiselessness—as though the Thing were being very still, listening.

And, here, in Cassandra's room, there was another silence. Before me in the shadows, the pallid oval of Cassandra's face wavered phantom-like, staring at me; the darkly brilliant eyes were tortured with a surprisingly sane fear. Abruptly, as though the silencing of that blasphemous incantation had momentarily released her to sanity, Cassie was in my arms, crying softly.

"Don't let him get me, darling! You mustn't let him get me! Promise you won't! Please! . . . I'm all right, now; it's only when I hear his voice that I can't refuse him. . . ."

"It's all right," I said thickly. "We'll get out of here somehow. . . . We'll go away where he can never touch you. . . ."

"No . . . no, I can't escape him that way. . . ."

"We can, Cassie! We must. . . ."

"No. . . . Believe me! I know! There's only one escape. . . . You've got to kill me. . . ."

"Cassie!"

"It's true! It's the only way out. If you don't care about me, think about the child . . . my child by him. . . ."

"Stop talking crazy. I tell you we'll get away. . . ."

"Think of the child," Cassandra insisted hoarsely. "I am the daughter of Zoth Syra. My father was a human; I was born in the image of that father. But, think of the child I must bear. . . . Suppose . . . suppose *he* is born in the image of *his* father . . . of that . . . that Thing out there!"

VIII

I WAS no longer seeing that frail, anguished visage, gray as death, with its ghastly, bluish throat-scars; I was no longer aware of the horror that shone through Cassandra's eyes—the terror of a mind caught in a web from which there was no escape. All I could see was that slavering, heinous monstrosity beyond the chamber door. A child! Its child, born in its own hideous image! It couldn't be! It must never happen! This lost decadent race of evil encrouching upon the earth, getting its hellish fruit upon humans—and in the end, overwhelming, conquering, reclaiming, as Lazarus Heath had prophesied!

"Cassandra! O, my bride! Princess of the Abyss, I call. Yoth Kala calls!"

Beneath my hands, I felt Cassandra's fragile body turn rigid; her flesh suddenly burned against mine. Those dark eyes glazed and protruded horribly, and at her throat, the bluish lines pulsed obscenely, like the gills of a fish, like the nauseous mouth of the Thing in the hall. I tried to hold her, but as the chant of Yoth Kala rose wildly, her clawed hands beat insanely at my face; their nails bit into the flesh. With a species of supernatural strength, Cassandra tore herself loose. She thrust me to one side, and was at the door, tearing frantically at the latch, shrilling a nasal, hypnotic reply to her mate.

Now, staring at the door itself, I saw the massive panels sag and warp, as if from tremendous pressure from without. A foetid black feeler oozed through the crevice at the bottom of the door. It circled, obscenely possessive, about Cassandra's ankles, evil, caressing. The storm throbbed at the blackened casements. There was no lightning, now; only endless, abysmal blackness and rising through it, all the myriad hateful voices of the Green Abyss, howling in chorus to the incantations of Yoth Kala and his bride.

What I did then was done with the sure, unthinking calm of a man who has reached his final decision. I walked slowly to Cassandra's side; she was no longer conscious

of my existence. She tore so maniacally at the door to freedom that her frail fingers bled. The revolver felt cool in my sweat-soaked grip. I brought the neat, business-like muzzle within a few inches of Cassandra's temple. I knew, now, that she was right. There was only one escape. I pulled the trigger.

I waited for death.

You must understand that. I fully expected to die. I had no idea of running. I saw Cassandra slump forward against the door. As she slid to the floor, her fingers clutched convulsively at the dark wood; the nails dug four parallel streaks the length of the panels. She lay very still. In that instant, as the crashing echo of the shot withered to silence through the catacombs of Heath House, a great terrified wail soared insanely above the onslaught of the storm; a scream of pain and unanswerable anger. The huge door bent beneath superhuman pressure. Then, slowly, as I waited for loathsome, foul-smelling death in the grip of Yoth Kala, a death I did not intend to fight, the weird chanting from without died away. There was silence. A strange, utterly peaceful silence such as Heath House had not known for countless years. I saw the black, stinking tentacle withdrawn from the room. Outside, in the hallway, a sickly hissing sound echoed mournfully. It moved down the staircase that creaked beneath its retreating weight.

I walked unsteadily to the casement window and gazed out through a strangely abated storm. A sudden, peaceful moon had crept from behind dull clouds. And across the cold moonlit strand, into the cove, once again to be swallowed by the sightless depths of the Green Abyss, slithered the hideous, hell-spawned Thing no other living man has ever seen. Yoth Kala was gone.

I know, now, why it happened that way. I have thought about it a great deal in these last lonely hours, and I believe I have found the answer. I had waited for the vengeance of Yoth Kala; I had expected to die as the destroyer of his bride. But, Yoth Kala could not reach me. As Lazarus Heath had been before her, Cassandra was an instrument. She was the key in the grip of the people of the Abyss, their only contact with this world that had cast them out ages since, the only one through whom they could regain a foothold in that world, on whom they could beget the race that would one day reclaim all that they had lost. When I killed Cassandra, I cut off that contact. Yoth Kala and his hideous breed were once more consigned to the bonded anonymity of the Abyss. This time, at least, the world had escaped their vengeance.

I walked back to where Cassandra lay, calm, and at peace. I sat down beside her, and smoothed her soft, warm hair gently. I think I cried. The storm whispered a lost protest and died. I sat there with Cassandra until late the next evening, when Dr. Ambler came to call, and found us.

Only another half-hour until dawn. The cell block has been very quiet most of the night. Outside, in the grayish half-light, there is a sound of distant business that seems ghostly coming in through the bars on the cold early morning air. There is a creaking of wood, and then a sudden thud. This is repeated several times. They are testing the spring-trap of my gallows.

They say that prayers help. If you have come this far, if you think you understand the story of Cassandra Heath, you might try it. Make it a very special sort of prayer. Not for Cassandra and me. All our prayers were said a long time since. We are at peace.

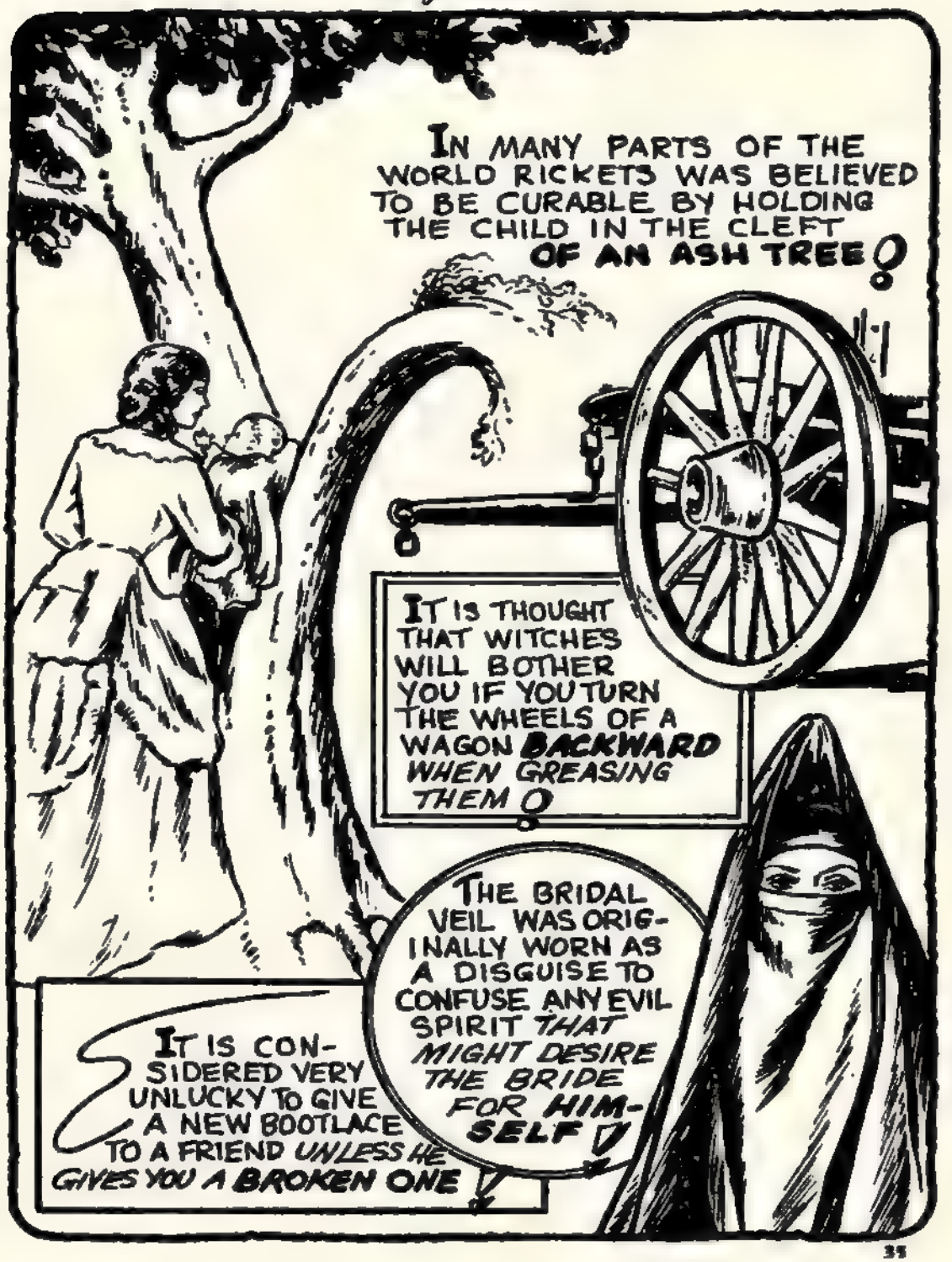
This prayer must be for you—for you and all the others who must be left behind, who cannot walk with me, up that final flight of wooden stairs, to peace and escape, who must go on living in the shadow of a monstrous evil of which they are not even aware, and so, can never destroy. You may need those prayers.

Somewhere beyond the edge of the last lone lip of land, beyond the rim of reality, sunken beneath the slime and weed of innumerable centuries, the creatures of the Abyss live on. Zoth Syra still reigns, and the syren songs are still sung. Entombed in their foul, watery empire, they writhe; restless, waiting. . . . This time they have lost their foothold. This time their link with the world of normalcy has been broken, their contact destroyed. This time they have failed.

But, they will try again . . . and again. . . .

Superstitions and Taboos

By Weill



Mayaya's Little Green Men

By
HAROLD LAWLOR

Heading
by
LEE
BROWN
COYE

I HAVE it here in the lower right-hand drawer of my desk, in a pint Mason jar full of alcohol. A gruesome souvenir, some might say, but I look upon it as a talisman. And—who knows?—some day I may go to Trinidad. . . .

Mayaya came unexpectedly, and just in the nick of time. For Peggy had been doing the cooking and cleaning, inefficiently enough, this long week past, and she was on the verge of hysteria that morning.

A rambling, reconverted farmhouse, twenty miles from town, is all very well and beautiful—in the decorators' magazines. But we'd had hell's own time of it trying to keep servants—three batches of them in less than two months. They couldn't stand the isolation, the lack of amusements.

So there were just the three of us now in a house with twelve rooms, two studios, and four baths; my wife Peggy, our three-year-old son Scooter, and myself. The servant-less week had left Peggy a wraith—a somewhat peevish wraith.

"No, no, no!" she said to Scooter, as

It's here—see—in this pint Mason jar: look but don't open!

we were at breakfast that morning in the kitchen. "The oatmeal goes *in* your face, darling, not on it."

Peggy's voice was on the thin edge, and I should have known better. I should have kept my mouth shut. But I said, "You've really exceeded yourself this morning, baby. The coffee is even lousier than yesterday's."

Peggy glared at me, speechless. Then her face broke up, and she laid her head in her arms on the table, and bawled. "If you can do any better," she cried incoherently, "go right ahead! I'm fed up! I'm nearly crazy! Max phoning me this morning that if I don't get the illustrations done for the Nellis book I'll never get another job out of them, so help him. And I'm three weeks behind now. And the bathrooms to be cleaned! And who *wanted* to live in the country, anyway? *You* did!"

"Sh, sh, sh!" For some time I'd been trying to stem the tide. "There, baby, calm down, for the love of Mike. We'll get somebody yet. And, anyway, I'll help—"

"A fat lot of help you are," Peggy sniffed. "You and your darned old soap operas."

"Yes, and where would we be if I didn't get an installment out every day, I'd like to know! You like to eat, don't you?"

"You can't *talk* to me like that!" Peggy cried.

"Oh, can't I?" We stood there glaring at each other, shaping up to a nice battle.

Scooter then added his bit to the general confusion by crying, "Whee!" and shoving his dish of oatmeal onto the linoleum.

"Oh, my God!" Peggy wailed at this last straw. "And I spent all day yesterday scrubbing that blasted—"

Obviously we were badly in need of help. Then the knock came on the kitchen door.

Peggy was in no condition to answer it, with her face all tear-streaked. I handed her my handkerchief sulkily. "Here, wipe your face. I don't know which is the bigger baby, you or Scooter. I'll go."

"Oh, shut up," Peggy said mildly.

So I opened the door, and Mayaya was there, smiling.

"GOOD day," she said softly. "I understand you are in need of domestic help?"

I couldn't help but stare. She was a very superior-looking colored girl. At least I thought she was colored, though she was no darker than well-creamed coffee. And rather beautiful, with unrouged skin, wine-red lips, and dark lustrous eyes. She was an undeniable figure of chic in her plain black coat and hat, and looked totally unlike any household help I'd ever seen before.

Peggy recovered first. "For heaven's sake, Jay, ask her in. You might even roll out the red carpet."

Our visitor laughed huskily, with a sound like muted chimes. "I'm Mayaya," she introduced herself.

"If you can make coffee, you're hired," I said.

Peggy glared at me for this. "And we'll get other servants to help you, just as soon as possible," she enticed.

The girl was already taking off her coat and hat, to our relief. She shooed us gently out of the kitchen, and in less than a half-hour called us to the breakfast room. The china, silver, glassware, were shining—which they certainly hadn't been under Peggy's inexpert ministrations. Scooter was already seated and—miracle!—his face was even clean for a change.

"Pinch me," Peggy whispered. "I don't believe a word of this."

Neither did I. But the coffee was marvelous. I smacked my lips.

"The bacon, the eggs, the muffins!" Peggy was almost delirious. "We've found ourselves a pearl!"

"What'd she say her name was, again?" I asked.

"Sounded like she said 'Me-yah-yah' to me."

"Never heard of a name like that."

"Listen," Peggy said intensely. "If she can go on like this, I don't care if she calls herself Ming Toy Fatima O'Rourke!"

Neither did I. We beamed at each other. Peace was restored. All was right with the world.

We thought.

There was just one small thing troubling me slightly. When Mayaya came in with more muffins—neat, clean, a candy pink *tignon* wrapped around her head—I asked her, "How did you know we were in need of domestic help?"

And that was when she said the strange thing.

She laughed throatily, "Oh, the little green men told me."

The little green men!

Well, we didn't think it so strange at the time. I thought it was just a phrase, a gag, one of those things you say. There was no impudence behind it, and as we were too glad to have her, we weren't really very curious to learn just how she'd known of our desperate need for a servant. So we dismissed the little green men from our minds.

For a while.

MAYAYA promised to keep a watchful eye on Scooter, so Peggy went off to her studio, and I went off to mine, and soon lost myself in the fictional woes of Ma Costello and her brood. (Universal Network. 10:45 a.m. It'll tear your heart out.) It was wonderful to be able to work again without stopping to blow Scooter's nose, or having to call up the laundry to bawl them out for ripping my shirts.

At noon I'd got Ma nicely embroiled with a loan shark, and her youngest son threatened with the reformatory (though innocent as an unborn babe), and her oldest daughter's lovable daughter stricken with acute appendicitis, when there was an interruption.

Peggy knocked on my door, and when I opened it she said solemnly, "Spooks!"

"Spooks?"

"M-h'm. Come and look."

She led me to the living room, and then stood there eyeing me expectantly. Clearly she expected me to be bowled over. But I couldn't see anything at first.

I blinked, and said, "So what?"

"Well, *look*, dummy! It's clean. And so are the other eleven rooms. And the four baths! Look at the gloss on that piano! Look at the windows, the blinds, the draperies. Spotless!"

I said, "You mean Mayaya did all this? In four hours? Alone?"

"And looked after Scooter besides!"

"Its impossible, I said flatly, knowing Scooter.

"It certainly is, Peggy agreed. "What did I tell you? Spooks!"

It made us just curious enough to ring for Mayaya. When the girl came in—neat, unobtrusive—Peggy cleared her throat. "Mayaya, the house looks beautiful. You couldn't have done this all alone?"

"Oh, no, Mrs. Chase."

Peggy and I looked bewildered. "Well, then, *who—?*"

Mayaya said, "The little green men. They helped me."

I started to laugh. I couldn't help it. After a minute, Peggy began to laugh, too. joined in. The three of us stood there laughing like fools. And what we were laughing at, I don't know. Nothing made any sense.

When Mayaya excused herself, and went back to the kitchen, I said to Peggy, "Our pearl is a jewel of the first water, honey, but she's nuts."

"She must be. Jay, do you suppose it's safe to leave Scooter with her? I know she adores him already, but—"

"Well, she doesn't seem to be violent. And, anyway, maybe we're wronging her. Maybe there really *are* some little green men."

"Jay, darling! Don't be a blithering, drivcling idiot!"

But, nevertheless, Peggy looked thoughtful. And so did I.

Definitely, the little green men were beginning to intrigue us.

BUT something happened that evening that wasn't funny. At least, we didn't think so. We saw it with our own eyes, and I don't mind telling you I could feel every hair on my scalp itching to stand erect as I watched. Not that it was such a macabre incident. It was just—impossible. Yet it happened.

Peggy, in chartreuse slacks, was sprawled on the floor in front of the fireplace reading a magazine. Scooter was upstairs in bed. Mayaya was in the kitchen washing the dinner dishes. And I was at the piano, picking out with one finger the *Meditation* from Massenet's *Thais*, which Peggy always claims gives her the colly-wobbles, whatever they are.

She said now, "Jay."

"Um?" I said, absorbed. The artist. I hit A instead of B flat, and winced myself.

"I'm not likely to fall asleep while you're

striking all those sour notes," Peggy said tartly, "but it really is stuffy in here. Open a window, will you, there's a lamb?"

"Can't."

"I know they're stuck, ever since the painters finished. But try again, Jay, please."

"Am I Tarzan, the ape? I like to broke my back last night trying to get 'em open, and—"

I broke off, struck by something in Peggy's expression. She was staring over my shoulder, her mouth open, her eyes wide. I turned to see what she was looking at.

The window behind me was sliding open of itself, easily, silently.

There was absolutely no one near it.

I tell you, it gave me the damnedest sensation in the small of my back. Like tiny mice scurrying up my spine.

Halfway up, the window stopped rising. The draperies swayed faintly in the breeze. And I turned at last to look at Peggy, my jaw ajar, like her own.

We stared at each other, speechless. Peggy was the first to regain her voice. She usually is.

She said, "Jay, wasn't that the strangest thing?"

It was the well-known rhetorical question. I didn't bother to answer. Instead I got up and went over to the window. And I'm ashamed to say I was almost afraid to touch it. But at last I put my hands on the sash and tried to shove it down.

I couldn't force it down any more than I could open it the night before. It was stuck fast in its frame, and it stayed stuck, though I shoved and heaved till I was red in the face, using all my strength, and I'm no lightweight.

I gave up at last, and I tell you I *backed* away from the window, never taking my eyes off it. Weakly I sat down on the piano bench. Peggy came over and huddled on it beside me. I put my arm around her, and we sat there gaping at the window as if we were hypnotized.

"Of course, there's one explanation—" I said at last, half in jest.

Peggy nodded, but she wasn't laughing. "The little green men," she whispered.

Well, this couldn't go on forever. On a sudden decision, I rang for Mayaya. She came in presently and stood before us respectfully, her head swathed in a poison-green *tignon*—a strangely exotic figure there in our living room. She looked at us inquiringly.

I swallowed. "Mayaya, I've been unable to open these windows since the painters finished a week ago. Yet tonight, when Mrs. Chase expressed a wish to have one of them open—one of them opened of itself."

If I had hoped to disconcert her, or expected expressions of disbelief or ignorance of the whole thing, I was disappointed.

Mayaya smiled faintly. It was as if she were secretly enchanted, and a little proud. "It might have been the little green men," she said. "They heard—and helped."

"But Mayaya!" I protested. "This is insane! Who—or what—are the little green men?"

"I do not know, Mr. Chase. When I left Trinidad to come to the States, *Maman* said they must accompany me."

"But we can't *see* them!" Peggy broke in.

"Oh, no, Mrs. Chase," Mayaya agreed. "Myself, I have never seen them either. I just know—they are there."

She beamed at us as if everything were reasonably explained. Eliciting information from Mayaya, we found, was like pushing one of those roly-poly toys children play with. You push it down, and think you have it down, and it bounces right back again, leaving you with a horrible feeling of frustration.

I tried again. "But Mayaya, we can't have the house cluttered up with invisible men!" I sounded like a fool, and I knew it, which didn't add to my peace of mind. "It's—it's eerie."

"But they have offered you no harm, Mr. Chase!" Mayaya protested. Her lovely eyes filled mistily. "Of course, if you want me to leave—"

Well, we didn't want her to leave. And in all fairness I have to admit we had no reason to think that Mayaya was laughing up her sleeve at us. It was obvious that she sincerely believed in the little green men.

So Peggy and I both protested we didn't want her to go. And that was the way the interview ended. Mayaya stayed.

And we were stuck with the little green men.

Peggy said, half-hysterically, "So help me, from now on I'll be afraid to take a shower!"

SCOOTER was next to be touched with the idiocy.

A scream from Peggy next morning brought me to my feet with a jerk. Life in the country, where we'd hoped to find peace, was rapidly becoming a nightmare. Leaving Ma Costello in the middle of a garrulous, valiant speech, her head bloody but still unbowed as it were, I raced for the stairs.

"Jay Chase, will you look at this child? What in the world—!"

Our nearest neighbor, Myles Slavitt, was standing in the hall, and in his arms was Scooter, dripping wet. Now that the initial sensation was over, Scooter seemed a little bored with it all.

"I faw inna fiss-pool," he announced matter-of-factly, albeit with a slightly apprehensive eye on me.

We had no time to question him in the ensuing confusion, while we got him upstairs, and dried him, and called the doctor. When the doctor came, he said there was still a little water in Scooter's lungs, but not much.

"Someone did a little excellent life-saving work, here," the doctor observed, "and got the rest of the water out promptly."

Naturally we thought it had been Slavitt. And though Peggy and I had never liked the man—he was too oleaginous, his manner too ingratiating—still we felt we owed him a debt of gratitude.

The doctor finally left, after putting Scooter to bed.

"And stay there, see?" I said at the door. "I hear you out of that bed inside of an hour, I'll come up and annihilate you."

Scooter smiled at me seraphically. And fell asleep. It had been just another incident in his crowded days.

Slavitt was still waiting downstairs.

Well, Scooter, as it transpired, hadn't fallen into a fishpool. He'd fallen into Myles Slavitt's swimming pool, near the diving board, where the water is twelve feet deep. And thereby hung a tale, according to Slavitt.

He seemed deeply puzzled by it all. "I didn't see him fall in. I was shaving in the upstairs bathroom, and I just happened to look out the window and see the little fella come up for what must have been the second or third time. Now I'm a heavy man, as you can see, and the pool is a long roundabout way from the house. There was no one else in sight. I thought the little fella was a goner, sure. It must have been all of ten minutes before I reached the pool, though I ran as fast as I could."

Peggy shivered, and moved closer to me.

"Well, sir," Slavitt said, bewildered, "When I got there, the kid was sitting on the edge of the pool, dripping wet and coughing a little, but otherwise okay. Now the water is low, and it's a good two-foot reach to grab the edge of the pool from inside. There's an overhang and it's quite a little job for a full-grown man to drag himself up. And the ladder out of the pool is 'way off at the shallow end. Besides, the kid couldn't swim, could he?"

"No," I said. I was feeling kind of peculiar, and doing a little puzzled thinking myself.

Slavitt nodded his head. "Then how did the little fella get out?" he asked triumphantly.

I shook my head slightly at Peggy, who looked as if she were about to speak. I thought I knew what she was going to say, and there was no use letting Slavitt think we were out of our minds.

"Somebody must have pulled him out." I ventured.

"That's just it!" Slavitt said. "There wasn't anybody around at all. Nobody's going to save a kid that size from drowning, and then just walk off and leave him, are they? It don't make sense."

"Well, who pumped the water out of his lungs? You?"

"No. He was all right when I got there, I tell you. Yet somebody must have done it. Who?"

There wasn't any answer. At least, no answer either Peggy or I cared to make to Slavitt.

Well, there was nothing to do but wait for our neighbor to leave, and Scooter to awaken from his nap so that we could question him. In the meantime, we were grateful to Slavitt, so Peggy rang for drinks.

It's strange to remember now that Slavitt's kindly errand of mercy was really

the starting point for the tragedy that was to follow.

Mayaya came in with the tray of drinks, neat and trim in her mulberry uniform. She looked the ideal maid, except for the turban of bon-bon yellow in which her head was wrapped.

I didn't like the look that came into Slavitt's face when he saw her, nor the way his eyes followed her as she moved about. I sensed that Mayaya was aware of his gaze, too, and resented it. Peggy was at the far end of the long living room, pouring salted nuts into a silver compote, and after a hasty glance in her direction, Slavitt nodded at Mayaya and said to me:

"Likely looking gal. Colored?"

I said, "Yes," shortly.

Slavitt chuckled, and said too loud, "Dark meat's sweetest, eh?" with a nudge and a leer at me.

It was hard to remember the man was a guest in the house. Peggy heard, and looked up, frowning. Mayaya shot him a venomous glance. I ached to poke him in the nose, but contented myself with changing the subject abruptly.

Myles Slavitt had a thick hide, but even he realized he'd spoken out of turn, and he flushed a little. It was an ugly little scene that left us all feeling acutely uncomfortable. Nevertheless the unpleasant glow remained in Slavitt's eyes whenever they rested on Mayaya as she passed through the hall.

I don't like to remember that I was the one who first spoke of the town meeting to be held the following night. For I can't help feeling that in doing so I played right into Slavitt's hand.

God knows why I urged Slavitt to attend. I must have been talking hastily, thoughtlessly, in my attempt to fill the awkward silence that had settled upon us after the man's earlier unpleasant remarks. I wished heartily that the fool would leave.

"My wife and I always go," I said, speaking of the town meeting. "Nothing very important ever comes up, but now that we own property here, we feel it's our duty."

Myles admitted he'd never before gone to any of the meetings, but he more or less promised to put in an appearance the following night.

Peggy and I didn't protest when he finally made a move to leave. I went with him to the hall, and Mayaya was there, holding the door open for him, which was unfortunate.

Apparently our stupid neighbor was a man who never learned.

He laid a too-familiar hand on Mayaya's arm, and said, "Those were fine drinks, girl."

Mayaya didn't cower. She bore herself with dignity. But she couldn't resist a glance of appeal at me.

Well, he'd been nice about Scooter, but there are limits to gratitude. I removed Myles' hand from her arm, ungently, and all but shoved him through the door. I'd had enough of him. He blustered a little on the doorstep, but when I stepped through the door, his voice trailed off, and he slunk away.

"Ugh!" Peggy said from the living room archway. "That goon!"

"Let's forget him," I said. "I'm sorry, Mayaya."

"It's quite all right, Mr. Chase, I understand," she said quietly. "Thank you."

"By the way," I said, "I wish you'd keep a closer watch on Scooter. You know what happened when he wandered away this morning."

"But he didn't wander away, Mr. Chase." Mayaya protested softly. "I knew he was gone. And I knew the little green men would watch over him. And, you see, they did."

My head was beginning to spin. And I knew Peggy's was, too, judging from the expression on her face.

SCOOTER was awake when we went up to the nursery, and fidgety to get out of bed. He seemed none the worse for his experience, and was a little restive under our questions.

Yes, he remembered going across the lawn to Slavitt's. Well, no, he didn't think he'd been so *very* naughty, 'zackly. Mayaya had told him he might leave her side. The little green men, she'd said, would watch over him.

Peggy and I exchanged glances over Scooter's head.

And there'd been a leaf floating on the surface of the pool, like a little boat. And, in reaching for it, he'd fallen in. And

water got all up his nose. And it hadn't been very nice, according to Scooter. He couldn't breathe. And he couldn't see. And finally everything went black, like at nighttime.

"I was afraid—just a little bit," he assured us solemnly.

Peggy hugged him. "Of course you were, darling. But now, try to remember—real hard. This is the important part. How did you get *out* of the pool?"

Scooter pushed out his lower lip, and squinted his eyes. He was thinking. He opened his eyes. "The little green men pulled me out!" he announced at last.

"But, darling, are you sure? Did you see them? Actually?"

Well. He was *pretty* sure he'd seen them. But he wasn't *very* sure. And could he get up now please?

It was hopeless. After all, he was only three. It was impossible to tell what he'd actually seen, and what his imagination was prompting him to believe he'd seen, fired as it had been by Mayaya's remarks.

Later, Peggy and I had a private confab behind the closed door of our room.

"I guess there's nothing else for it," I said. "We'll have to let her go before we all wind up batty."

"But Jay, dear, she's so wonderful in every other way."

I raised an eyebrow. "She—or the little green men?"

"Jay! You don't really believe in them, and you know it."

"Do you?"

"Certainly not!" Peggy was indignant. But after a minute, she added thoughtfully, "Still, you have to admit—"

"Oh, for God's sake!" I shouted irritably. "You see? She has us all headed for the nut factory."

"Well, let's wait till the end of the week, at least. I'll have the Nellis illustrations done by then, if I hurry, and—well."

So we left it at that. And there's no use now blaming ourselves for not having fired Mayaya immediately.

WE HAD dismissed Myles Slavitt so completely from our minds that we didn't even notice he wasn't at the town meeting next night.

There was the usual argument about whether or not a traffic signal was needed at First and Main. And Jed Stout was warned sternly again he'd better fix that there hole in the sidewalk in front of his store afore somebody broke their neck—at which Jed looked blank. (He was becoming adept at looking blank by this time.)

Peggy and I left at eleven, a little smug with the sense of a duty conscientiously performed, and highly amused all the way home at Jed Stout's callous unconcern for the necks of his fellow-townsmen. I remember we made an hilarious bet as to whether or not Jed would relent at the next meeting.

Unfortunately, our gaiety wasn't to last.

We'd no sooner turned off the highway onto our private lane, and the house loomed up distantly before us, than we knew something was radically wrong. Every light in the place was out. Even if Mayaya had retired early, she had instructions to leave the hall light burning. And it wasn't like her to be forgetful.

Peggy grew alarmed at once.

"Jay, hurry!" She sat on the edge of the seat. "I have a feeling—"

I was uncomfortable myself. I stepped on it, and we covered the last mile of private lane in nothing flat. Gravel spit under the tires as we jerked to a stop. We could hear Scooter sobbing softly to himself in the hall, even before we could get the door open. I was all thumbs, and the damned key wouldn't go into the lock, and it didn't help any to have Peggy needling me with, "Oh, hurry *up!*" accompanied by nervous prods in the back.

The door opened at last, and we practically fell over ourselves getting into the hall. I snapped the light on, and Scooter rushed into Peggy's arms, howling.

"Oh, my darling! What's the matter?" Peggy cried.

God, the hall was a sight! There were streaks of blood all over the white marbleized linoleum, the mahogany chairs were overturned, and the Chippendale mirror had been knocked from the wall and lay in fragments.

But Scooter was all right, though terrified.

While Peggy tried to quiet him, I went into the darkened living room, and tripped over something on the floor just beyond the

arch. I fumbled for the ceiling light switch, found it. And then I was calling sharply to Peggy, "You stay out there in the hall."

I paid no attention to her startled questions.

Mayaya was lying on the floor before me, face down. I turned her over gently, though there was no real need of gentleness, for she was dead. Apparently she'd been choked to death. There wasn't a scratch on her.

Then why all the blood in the hall?

I was mystified.

I switched off the light again, and went to the phone in the hall, to call Doc and the police. When I'd got the two numbers at last, I spoke as quickly and briefly as possible.

Peggy overheard. "You mean—she's been murdered?"

"She certainly didn't strangle herself."

Scooter was still sobbing a little, and babbling of a "great, big man."

"But Jay, who—?"

I WAS beginning to think I knew. But Peggy was white and shivering, so I kept my mouth shut about my suspicions. I said instead, "You go upstairs, Peg. I'm going to follow these bloodstains. They seem to lead outside."

"I won't stay in this house with a corpse!" Peggy announced flatly. "I coming with you."

I couldn't argue her out of it. And, anyway, she was probably safer near me. Still holding Scooter, she followed me to the car where I got a flashlight.

There were stains all over the doorstep, and the gravel driveway was streaked with them, leading to the left toward Slavitt's place.

Peggy gripped my arm. "Jay! Slavitt! Of course!"

I nodded grimly. I wanted to get my hands on Slavitt before the police came. He'd be too safe with the police.

We started off toward the Slavitt estate, following the bloodstains, but I wasn't quite prepared for what I found.

For I found Slavitt all right. The flash lighted up something just over his lot line. I turned it quickly aside, and said to Peggy, "Stay back here. I'm only going a few steps farther on. Don't let Scooter see, and don't look yourself."

I'd had just a glimpse in the momentary glare of the flash, but it had been enough. When I was sure she wouldn't follow, I went ahead gingerly.

He was lying there, face down, and his clothing had been shredded from his body. I needed only one sickened closer glance at the raw, red bleeding mass of pulp to know that he was forever beyond help—or further punishment. God, what a way to die! He'd been literally skinned alive by what must have been hundreds of tiny knives wielded by who knows whose hands?

The hands of the little green men?

Yes. They'd been too late to save Mayaya, but they'd revenged themselves horribly upon Slavitt. I'm positive. For, you see, there was something else.

Peggy took one glance at my face when I reached her side again, and mercifully asked no questions. It wasn't until we were back at the house, waiting for the police, that she noticed how tightly Scooter's hands were clenched.

"Jay, Scooter seems to have something in his hand."

He was still hysterical, poor kid. We had to pry his hand open, for he kept it clenched convulsively. But we took at last from his small moist palm, the tiny lifeless figure of a little green man.

"I found him on the floor," Scooter sobbed. "The big man hurted him, and I picked him up—"

I have it here in the lower right hand drawer of my desk in a pint Mason jar full of alcohol. A gruesome souvenir, some might say, but I look upon it as a talisman. And—who knows?—some day I may go to Trinidad. . . .

Let's Play "Poison"

By RAY BRADBURY

"WE HATE you!" cried the sixteen boys and girls rushing and crowding about Michael in the schoolroom. Michael screamed. Recess was over, Mr. Howard, the teacher, was still absent from the filling room. "We hate you!" and the sixteen boys and girls, bumping and clustering and breathing, raised a window. It was three flights down to the sidewalk. Michael flailed.

They took hold of Michael and pushed him out the window.

Mr. Howard, their teacher, came into the room. "Wait a minute!" he shouted.

Michael fell three flights. Michael died.

Nothing was done about it. The police shrugged eloquently. These children were all eight or nine, they didn't understand what they were doing. So.

Mr. Howard's breakdown occurred the next day. He refused, ever again, to teach! "But why?" asked his friends. Mr. Howard gave no answer. He remained silent and a terrible light filled his eyes, and later he remarked that if he told them the truth they would think him quite insane.

Mr. Howard left Madison City. He went to live in a small nearby town, Green Bay, for seven years, on an income managed from writing stories and poetry.

He never married. The few women he approached always desired—children.

In the autumn of his seventh year of self-enforced retirement, a good friend of Mr. Howard's, a teacher, fell ill. For lack of a proper substitute, Mr. Howard was summoned and convinced that it was his duty to take over the class. Because he realized the appointment could last no longer than a few weeks, Mr. Howard agreed, unhappily.

Can it be that children—all children—are invaders from another dimension!

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

"Sometimes," announced Mr. Howard, slowly pacing the aisles of the schoolroom on that Monday morning in September, "sometimes, I actually believe that children are invaders from another dimension."

He stopped, and his shiny dark eyes snapped from face to face of his small audience. He held one hand behind him, clenched. The other hand, like a pale animal, climbed his lapel as he talked and later climbed back down to toy with his ribboned glasses.

"Sometimes," he continued, looking at William Arnold and Russell Newell, and Donald Bowers and Charlie Hencoop, "sometimes I believe children are little monsters thrust out of hell, because the devil could no longer cope with them. And I certainly believe that everything should be done to reform their uncivilized little minds."

Most of his words ran unfamiliarly into the washed and unwashed ears of Arnold, Newell, Bowers and Company. But the tone inspired one to dread. The little girls lay back in their seats, against their pigtails, lest he yank them like bell-ropes, to summon the dark angels. All stared at Mr. Howard, as if hypnotized.

"You are another race entirely, your motives, your beliefs, your disobediences," said Mr. Howard. "You are not human. You are—children. Therefore, until such time as you are adults, you have no right to demand privileges or question your elders, who know better."

He paused, and put his elegant rump upon the chair behind the neat, dustless desk.

"Living in your world of fantasy," he said, scowling darkly. "Well, there'll be no fantasy here. You'll soon discover that a ruler on your hand is no dream, no faerie frill, no Peter Pan excitement." He snorted. "Have I frightened you? I have. Good! Well and good. You deserve to be. I want you to know where we stand. I'm not afraid of you, remember that. I'm not afraid of you." His hand trembled and he drew back in his chair as all their eyes stared at him. "Here!" He flung a glance clear across the room. "What're you whispering about, back there? Well, young men?"

Donald Bowers arose. "We don't like you. That's all we said." He sat down again.

Mr. Howard raised his brows. "I like frankness, truth. Thank you for your honesty. But, simultaneously, I do not tolerate flippant rebellion. You'll stay an hour after school tonight and wash the boards."

AFTER school, walking home, with autumn leaves falling both before and after his passing, Mr. Howard caught up with four of his students. He rapped his cane sharply on the sidewalk. "Here, what are you children doing?"

The two startled boys and girls jerked as if struck upon their shoulders by his cane. "Oh," they all said.

"Well," demanded the man. "Explain. What were you doing here when I came up?"

William Arnold said, "Playing poison."

"Poison!" Their teacher's face twisted. He was carefully sarcastic. "Poison, poison, playing poison. Well. And how does one play poison?"

Reluctantly, William Arnold ran off.

"Come back here!" shouted Mr. Howard.

"I'm only showing you," said the boy, hopping over a cement block of the sidewalk. "How we play poison. Whenever we come to a dead man we jump over him."

"One does, does one?" said Mr. Howard.

"If you jump on a dead man's grave, then you're poisoned and fall down and die," explained Isabel Skelton, much too brightly.

"Dead men, graves, poisoned," Mr. Howard said, mockingly. "Where do you get this dead man idea?"

"See?" said Clara Parris, pointing with her arithmetic. "On this square, the name of the two dead men."

"Ridiculous," retorted Mr. Howard, squinting down. "Those are simply the names of the contractors who mixed and laid the cement sidewalk."

Isabel and Clara both gasped wildly and turned accusing eyes to the two boys. "You said they were gravestones!" they cried, almost together.

William Arnold looked at his feet. "Yeah. They are. Well, almost. Any-

way." He looked up. "It's late. I gotta go home. So long."

Clara Parris looked at the two little names cut into the sidewalk. "Mr. Kelly and Mr. Terrill," she read the names. "Then these aren't graves? Mr. Kelly and Mr. Terrill aren't buried here? See, Isabel, that's what I told you, a dozen times I did."

"You did not," sulked Isabel.

"Deliberate lies," Mr. Howard tapped his cane in an impatient code. "Falsification of the highest calibre. Good God, Mr. Arnold, Mr. Bowers, there'll be no more of this, do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," mumbled the boys.

"Speak up!"

"Yes, sir," they replied, again.

Mr. Howard swung off swiftly down the street. William Arnold waited until he was out of sight before he said, "I hope a bird drops something right smack on his nose—"

"Come on, Clara, let's play poison," said Isabel, hopefully.

Clara pouted. "It's been spoiled. I'm going home."

"I'm poisoned!" cried Donald Bowers, falling to the earth and frothing merrily. "Look, I'm poisoned! Gahhh!"

"Oh," cried Clara, angrily, and ran away.

SATURDAY morning Mr. Howard glanced out his front window and swore when he saw Isabel Skelton making chalk marks on his sidewalk and then hopping about, making a monotonous sing-song with her voice.

"Stop that!"

Rushing out, he almost flung her to the pavement in his emotion. He grabbed her and shook her violently and let her go and stood over her and the chalk marks.

"I was only playing hopscotch," she sobbed, hands over her eyes.

"I don't care, you can't play it here," he declared. Bending, he erased the chalk marks with his handkerchief, muttering. "Young witch. Pentagrams. Rhymes and incantations, and all looking perfectly innocent, God, how innocent. You little fiend." He made as if to strike her, but stopped. Isabel ran off, wailing. "Go ahead, you little fool!" he screamed, furiously. "Run off and tell your little cohorts that you've failed. They'll have to try some other way! They won't get around me, they won't, oh, no!"

He stalked back into his house and poured himself a stiff drink of brandy and drank it down. The rest of the day he heard the children playing kick-the-can, hide-and-seek, Over, Annie, Over, jacks, tops, mibs, and the sound of the little monsters in every shrub and shadow would not let him rest. "Another week of this" he thought, "and I'll be stark staring." He flung his hand to his aching head. "God in heaven, why weren't we all born adults?"

Another week, then. And the hatred growing between him and the children. The hate and the fear growing apace. The nervousness, the sudden tantrums over nothing, and the—the silent waiting, the way the children climbed the trees and looked at him as they swiped late apples, the melancholy smell of autumn settling in around the town, the days growing short, the night coming too soon.

"But they won't touch me, they won't dare touch me," thought Mr. Howard, sucking down one glass of brandy after another. "It's all very silly anyhow, and there's nothing to it. I'll soon be away from here, and —them. I'll soon—"

There was a white skull at the window.

It was eight o'clock of a Thursday evening. It had been a long week, with the angry flares and the accusations. He had had to continually chase the children away from the water-main excavation in front of his house. Children loved excavations, hiding places, pipes and conduits and trenches, and they were ever ascramble over and on and down in and up out of the holes where the new pipes were being laid. It was all finished, thank the Lord, and tomorrow the workmen would shovel in the earth and tamp it down and put in a new cement sidewalk, and that would eliminate the children. But, right now—

There was a white skull at the window!

There could be no doubt that a boy's hand held the skull against the glass, tapping and moving it. There was a childish tittering from outside.

Mr. Howard burst from the house. "Hey, you!" He exploded into the midst of the three running boys. He leaped after them,

shouting and yelling. The street was dark, but he saw the figures dart beyond and below him. He saw them sort of bound and could not remember the reason for this, until too late.

The earth opened under him. He fell and lay in a pit, his head taking a terrific blow from a laid water-pipe, and as he lost consciousness he had an impression as of an avalanche, set off by his fall, cascading down cool moist pellets of dirt upon his pants, his shoes, upon his coat, upon his spine, upon the back of his neck, his head, filling his mouth, his ears, his eyes, his nostrils. . . .

The neighbor lady with the eggs wrapped in a napkin, knocked on Mr. Howard's door the next day for five minutes. When she opened the door, finally, and walked in, she found nothing but specules of rug-dust floating the sunny air, the big halls were empty, the cellar smelled of coal and clinkers, and the attic had nothing in it but a rat, a spider, and a faded letter. "Funniest thing," she said many times in the following years, "what ever happened to Mr. Howard."

And adults, being what they are, never observant, paid no attention to the children playing "Poison" on Oak Bay Street, in all the following autumns. Even when the children leaped over one particular square of cement, twisted about and glanced at the childish scrawled marks on it which read:

"M. HOWARD—R.I.P."

"Who's Mr. Howard, Billy?"

"Aw, I guess he's the guy who laid the cement."

"What does R. I. P. mean?"

"Aw, who knows? You're poison! You stepped on it!"

"Get along, get along, children; don't stand in Mother's path! Get along now!"

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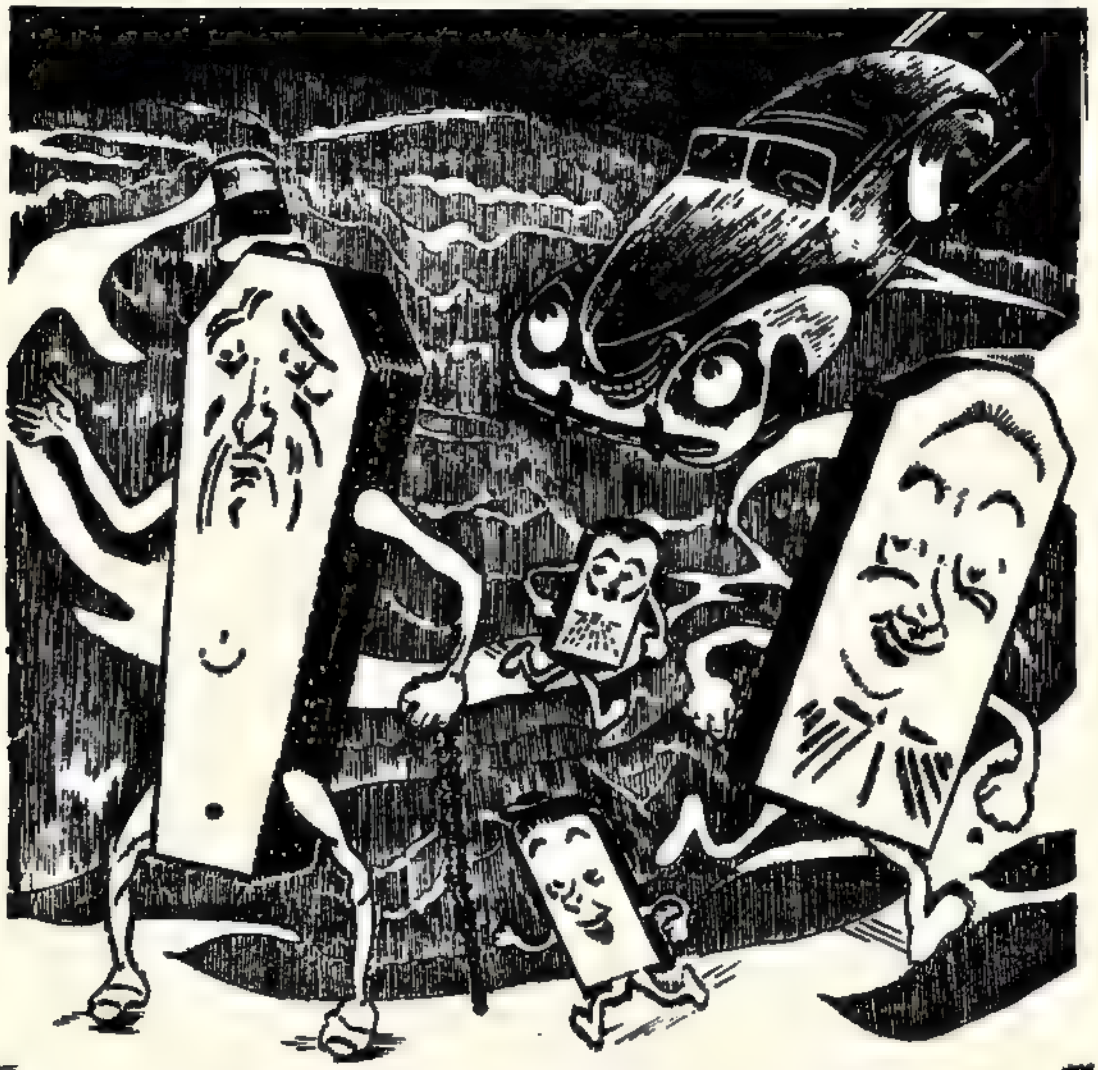
A Collector of Stones

By AUGUST DERLETH

MR. ELISHA MERRIHEW, a fat man with money and a pink complexion, was a collector of stones, and, like many collectors, he was not too ethical about the ways in which stones came into his possession. One might have conceived some faint, if unethical, sympathy for Mr. Merrihew if he had collected

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE



You know the enthusiasm of a born collector, and how much it takes to deter him! This is about the "how-much!"

precious stones, but no, he was interested in the most common kind of garden variety, ranging all the way from field rocks to discarded paving blocks. He built things with them, one hobby leading to another; he had built a dwelling for himself—commodious, too—a summer-house, a tea-house, and no less than four hundred and fifty-seven feet of path around his estate, which was well off in the country and away from too inquisitive neighbors.

He was still at building paths—this time a rambling by-way leading to his boathouse on the nearby lake—when he stopped his car one afternoon beside a wood and made a delightful discovery. Not very far from the road, just over a broken-down old fence, there lay four sizable stones, smooth, too, apart from the weather-wear they showed, and just exactly right for his walk. Since there was no one, and not a house within sight, Mr. Merrihew crossed the fence and appropriated them, lugging them one after the other to the back seat of his car—the trunk was not good enough for them—and driving off with them.

It was not until he had got all the way home in the summer dusk that he discovered that the stones had some sort of lettering on them. The light was no longer strong enough to see by; so he brought his flashlight into use, but this did not help much, after all, for the lettering, such as it had been, was very largely worn away. The stones appeared to have borne some kind of dates, but beyond that Mr. Merrihew could make out nothing. Nor could he discern anything further the following day, when he had a very good time all by himself laying the four stones he had discovered so fortuitously in various places, just where they would do the most good, along the path to the lake. They shone faintly gray among the limestone flagging he had got together for most of the walk.

Mr. Merrihew was very proud of his newly completed walk, and, as always when he was proud, he had to take the occasion to show off his most recent accomplishment by inviting some of his friends out to dinner. Like Mr. Merrihew, his friends were very largely conservative and middle-aged, not as far as birthdays went, but only as far as mental outlook was concerned. Since Mr. Merrihew never failed to put on a lavish meal, his friends never deserted him; they were complacent and duly enthusiastic about the new house, the summer-house, the tea-house, and the hundreds of feet of walk around the estate, and they were prepared to be fully as complacent and enthusiastic about Mr. Merrihew's most recent addition.

Their host, however, owing to the necessity of helping his man with dinner, could not himself display his latest achievement, but simply sent his guests sauntering down the walk to the lake and prepared to regale them at dinner with all the figures and facts pertaining to this most immediate indulgence of his hobby.

BUT somehow things did not go quite as Mr. Merrihew had a right to expect.

For one thing, instead of the usual paean of praise Merrihew was accustomed to hear from Shane Rodder, who was the first of the little group of three to come in, he was greeted with a casual smile and a remark that, to put it mildly, was certainly uncalled for.

"What was that?" asked Merrihew a little sharply.

"You seem to have got quite a little more help around the place," said Rodder.

Merrihew stiffened; he interpreted this as a direct reflection upon the newly completed walk. "I laid all the stones by myself, with no help whatever—quite as usual," he answered.

"Oh, I didn't suggest that you had help."

"Then what did you mean?"

"The people."

"People?" echoed Merrihew. "As far as I know, Bascomb and I are alone here—apart from my guests for tonight."

At this moment Mrs. Rivercomb came in, and without pause delivered herself of a hearty opinion. "I must say, Lisha, you have a nice walk there—but why send us out before you've got the stones really down? I stubbed my toe twice and almost fell—but Pat caught me."

"Yes, that's right," said Pat, coming in behind her. "Luckily a husband's still some help these days."

Merrihew controlled himself with effort. "When I left the walk it was in perfect shape," he said finally.

"I say someone was digging in some of the stones," said Mrs. Rivercomb.

"Or out."

"Oh, nonsense—out!" said Rodder. "The gray ones, wasn't it?"

"You *did* notice!" exclaimed Mrs. Rivercomb.

Merrihew tried hard to keep from showing his now profound irritation. He knew very well that his walk had been perfect; even the usually taciturn and noncommittal Bascomb had complimented him on his work.

Yet, if his guests were hazing him, they were doing so with an amazing amount of casual dignity. He wanted to yield to an impulse to give them a piece of his mind, but there was something so guileless in their attitude that he could not.

Without a word, he put down the platter he was carrying and left the room. He went out of the house straight down the walk to the lake. It was a balmy night in August, and the breeze from the lake blew cool and fragrant with the smell of fresh water after a warm day. The lake walk was not in a straight line, but wound in and out among the clumps of lilac and syringa, under the trees and past a tumble-down shed which had once been a boathouse.

AS HE came around a lilac bush, Merrihew was astonished to see someone bending over his walk, quite as if at work there. He let out a hoarse bellow of anger and charged—only to fall flat on his face, bruising his nose considerably, squarely in the middle of his walk. When he had recovered sufficiently to look around him, he saw that he was quite alone; no one else was near. He saw also that he had fallen over one of his large gray stones, which was certainly not in the position he had left it—not flat and level, but standing up-end, crazily.

Merrihew looked at it for a long minute. Then he turned and looked down the walk toward the lake. He saw the other gray stones readily enough; each one of them was out of place. He got up and walked down to the other three stones. Each of them bore evidence of someone's having dug around in the sand in a patent attempt to either set up or move the stones.

Clearly the work of vandals—perhaps some envious neighbor.

Working furiously, he flattened each stone again; it was not quite level, but he could straighten each one in the morning. And then woe betide anyone who dared to meddle with his walk!

Somewhat disheveled, he went back to the house, where his guests had lent Bascomb a hand, with such good effect that dinner was now on the table, and they waited only for him.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Rivercomb at sight of him. "What in the world happened to you, Lisha?"

"Vandals," he growled. He marched off to the bathroom to tidy himself up, and, coming back to take his place at the table, turned inquisitively to Rodder. "Now, then—what about those people you saw?"

Rodder looked dubious. "I wouldn't say they looked much like vandals to me. A middle-aged man, a woman I took to be his wife, a young girl, and a young man, I'd say of about twenty or so. Looked like a family. I thought you'd got a new family in to help out."

"Where were they?"

"Oh, down along the walk. Not together, exactly—sort of lined up. They took off when I came along."

"Which direction?" barked Merrihew.

Rodder opened his lips to speak, but no words came for a long moment. He looked faintly ridiculous. "Well, now, that's a stunner," he said finally. "I don't believe I can tell you which direction they went. They were just there one moment and next, they had gone—into the bushes, I suppose. Probably felt they were out of place."

"They certainly were," said Merrihew. "I saw one of them, too—just for an instant. The young man, I think."

The conversation grew animated, but no less unclear. That someone had been meddling with Merrihew's walk was not to be doubted, even though the Rivercombs had *seen* no one. Mrs. Rivercomb had twice almost fallen on the walk where the vandals had dug, and that was evidence enough in its own right. The motive for such vandalism was obscure indeed. Rodder's description of the little girl, whom he had seen most clearly, suggested no one Merrihew

knew, nor did her quaint dress offer him any clue. The old man, said Rodder, had seemed to be wearing an old-fashioned broad-brimmed hat and a frock coat which had the look of being a century old—but of course, it was twilight or deepening dusk, and Rodder could not be too sure of what he had seen. Merrihew was not helped in his attempt to puzzle out the problem, but had to fall back upon the conviction that somehow, somewhere he must have incurred the envy or anger of someone who had chosen this means to avenge himself.

But—a family group? That was incredible. Even in his most above-board dealings, Merrihew had been careful to confine his affairs to one or at most two people at a time. The only family, as family, he had ever dealt with was the owner of a limestone quarry, and these people had never had any fault to find with Merrihew's rates of payment. Moreover, they were a husband, wife, and three sons, and not at all like Rodder's slim description.

WHEN at last his little party broke up, the subject of the walk to the lake was almost embarrassing. Merrihew was no closer to a solution of his mystery than he had been at the outset. He saw his guests off, and came back into the house, sorely puzzled. The more he thought about the events of the evening, with their faintly ludicrous aspect, the more involved he became.

He had already begun to undress when he thought of making another inspection of the walk. Forthwith, he put on his bedroom slippers, got into his dressing-gown, and went quietly out of the house to the lake walk. He walked with extreme care and in silence, and when he came to that clump of lilacs beyond which he should catch sight of the first of those fine gray stones, he went along with all the stealth of a second-story man.

Even so, he was hard put to it to suppress an angry oath at what he saw. There was that young fellow once more, pulling and tugging at the stone, and not far beyong him, a little girl doing likewise. And now far beyond her, one after the other, a man and a woman—pulling, pushing, moving the stones, little by little. Indeed, the young fellow already had his stone well off the line of the walk, about three feet offside. All four of them worked as if with great effort, not a word passing among them, and, what was more curious still, not a sound.

Dim though the starlight was, it was not so dim that Merrihew had any doubt about their being strangers. He had never, to the best of his knowledge, seen any one of that odd, quaint group—and quaint they certainly were. He had never before happened upon so oddly dressed a group of vandals. Their costumes clearly belonged to a time decades, almost a century, ago. Merrihew had just enough of a smattering of psychiatry to be certain that these people were probably mildly obsessed in some form or other, victims of phobias, or queer compulsions. Moreover, watching them, he remembered that in the previous night he had once or twice thought he had heard suspicious noises from the direction of the garage, where he had kept the stones overnight.

Well, there was nothing to do but face it. It was certain to be disagreeable—for them. Trumpeting loudly, Merrihew came around the lilac bushes, out of his concealment, and strode toward the vandals who dared to tear up his walk.

"There's no need to run," he said, raising his voice so that all might hear him, "because I've been watching you for some time." And there he stopped, open-mouthed for, though the row of displaced stones clearly attested to vandalism, the perpetrators of this wanton act had nevertheless managed to slip away. For only a moment Merrihew stood there; then his anger got the best of him. He ran this way and that, shouting, growing angrier by the moment, until Bascomb, roused by all the hullabaloo, showed up coming down the walk, carrying a stout poker.

"Look! Just look!" shouted Merrihew, gesticulating at the stones.

Bascomb clucked and shook his head.

"Well, don't stand there! Get a flashlight and hold it while I put these back into place."

Merrihew raved incontinently all the while he repaired, as best he could, his walk, and then saw Bascomb back to bed

with an ill-tempered peroration in regard to what ought to be done to vandals. Bascomb responded in the only way he thought might be effective; he showed up discreetly with a double whiskey and soda and left it stand significantly at Merrihew's bedside.

Merrihew, however, was in no mood for sleep. The more he considered this invasion of his rights as a private citizen, the more angry he got. His thoughts rang with sententious variations of the fact that a man's home is his castle, and so on, and he worked himself up to such a pitch that he finally got out a shotgun he had not used in an age, and spent half an hour oiling and cleaning it. Moreover, he fully intended to use it.

The hour was now approximately two o'clock in the morning. It was hardly likely that the vandals would make another sortie so late, but Merrihew remained uneasy. Nevertheless, he compromised so far with his anger as to get himself into bed, and there he lay fuming still, and trying at odd times to go to sleep. His attempts were not very successful; he kept imagining that he heard the clink of stone on stone; he fancied he heard dragging noises, just as if someone were making off with his treasures. And finally, he got up.

IT WAS now four o'clock, and the dawn would be breaking before very long. He resigned himself to doing without sleep and got dressed. Then he took his shotgun and went outside, gravitating naturally to the lake walk. Just in the remote case that the vandals had returned, he went with great care.

His care in this occasion was quite unnecessary.

There was no sign of any invader. But Merrihew's satisfaction at this was considerably ameliorated by what he next saw. He gave a bellow of rage and started forward. There was no need of haste, however; his four gray stones were gone. They had been pried up and lifted out of his walk, and there was no sign of them within range of his sight.

After satisfying himself of this, Merrihew rapidly decided that the vandals could not have got far with his stones. He doubled back across his lawns to his garage, got out his car, and roared out onto the highway. But now—which way to go? He had his choice of two directions—either to the city or away from it. He elected at once to drive away from it, reasoning that such individuals as he had seen were not likely to have come out of any city. Moreover, the direction he chose to drive went into the same remote country out of which he had got the stones in the first place.

He hardly had time to reflect upon the ridiculousness of his impulse before he caught sight of the vandals who had robbed him. There they were—all four of them—man, woman, boy, and girl—going down the middle of the road with the stones on their backs! It was incredible, but there it was; the headlights of his car picked them out plainly enough, though the stones were plainest, seeming to absorb and yet reflect the light, so that it was as if the vandals carrying them were the merest shadows beneath. He did not stop to wonder at all; there were his stones; there were the vandals who had stolen them. With a shout, he stepped on the gas and bore down on them, pounding his horn.

Down came the stones to the asphalt, directly in front of his car. Merrihew slammed on his brakes, reached for his shotgun, and jumped from his car. "And now, you thieves!" she shouted.

But his vehemence was in vain. Once again his vandals had disappeared. Merrihew felt violently frustrated. He wanted to discharge buckshot at some one, preferably the old man who appeared to be the leader of that curious crew. But the road was silent and deserted, save for Merrihew, his car, and his stolen stones, which lay in an uneven row across the asphalt. The lights of his car combined with the first streaks of the dawn to cast an unearthly glow over the scene.

Resigning himself at last to the fact that there was no one at whom he could shoot in vengeance or for the satisfaction of his honor, Merrihew impatiently loaded the stolen stones into the back seat of his car and climbed back in to turn around and take them back.

But at that moment something very untoward took place. Merrihew had just started the car and was prepared to turn,

when he felt all around him a fluttering of hands. The car spurted forward, the wheel he had half turned was turned back, and away went the car with Merrihew at the wheel but with Merrihew very much not in control.

HE GREW chill with unnatural fear. He felt hands like down. He felt bodies pressing against him, light as wind. He felt things probing the dashboard, the brakes, the wheel. In the wan light of earliest down he thought he saw faces—an old man's, a woman's, a boy's, a little girl's. He wanted to shout, but he could not; he sat as a mound of gooseflesh, feeling other hands but his guide the wheel, knowing with the instinct of a long-time driver that the guiding hands were unfamiliar with the wheel, the car. And other pressure but his foot was on the accelerator!

The car increased in speed. It tore down the road, turned an easy corner on two wheels, and leapt into a side road—with Merrihew petrified inside. In the glow of the headlights, suddenly Merrihew saw the forlorn woodland spot where he had found the stones.

The car drove straight for it.

The car leapt the ditch, hurdled the fence, and drove directly into a tree with such force that Merrihew went up through the windshield, and the four gray stones flew up out of the car and landed all around him. In the gray light of the dawn, Merrihew saw through his darkening stupor four figures floating out of his car—all four of them light as thistledown, and with the dawn shining right through them; he saw them tugging and pulling at the stones, and, one after the other, sinking down into the earth beneath them.

Merrihew's head had come up against a square stone marked with lettering on it. But it was not until he was some time out of the hospital that he got around to coming back and reading it. What it had to say was succinct and adequately informative:

DUNLAP FAMILY CEMETERY

Here Lieth ABNER DUNLAP, *His Wife,* AMANDA, *and Their Children,* ELIZA *and* JONATHAN, *Slain by Indians in the Year of Our Lord, 1831.*

Woe Betide Him Who Disturbs Them or Molests What Is Theirs!

Subsequent to his release from the hospital, Elisha Merrihew developed a curious aversion to stones. He abandoned them altogether and took up the collection of books, which, for a hitherto unimaginative man, seemed much safer.

The Door

By HARRIET A. BRADFIELD

HERE is the door in swift shadow,
Hidden from human eyes;
Guarding forbidden secrets
From prying guess and surmise.

Dark is the door leading downward
Into the tomb of the mind;
Here in this Bluebeard's closet
Tremble for what you may find!

Eyes in the Dark

By ***SEABURY QUINN***

A man falls dead—no reason—no injury. . . .

"I AGREE entirely," Jules de Grandin nodded vigorously. "Too many of our profession wear blinders. This prejudice against Chiropractic is pig-ignorant as that shown against anesthesia when Simpson introduced it, or the abuse heaped on your own illustrious Holmes when he contended puerperal fever is infectious. Me, I think—*mordieu*, watch him! He will not live to grow old, that one!"

Dodging drunkenly from the curb, a man had run into the roadway almost directly in the path of our car, and, as I clamped my brakes on frenziedly, fell sprawling to the pavement.

He lay face downward on the asphalt when we reached him, both arms extended to full length like those of a diver when he hits the water, and no clothing-dummy flung into the street could have been limper. "I'm sure we didn't hit him!" I exclaimed as we bent over the prostrate figure. "There was no jar—"

"You have right, my friend," de Grandin cut in. "I saw him fall a full three feet from the wheels but"—he looked up bleakly—"nevertheless, he is dead."

"Dead?" I echoed incredulously.

"*Comme un maquereau,*" he agreed. "Completely; utterly."

"But—"

"I think that we had better save our buts for the inquest, friend Trowbridge. It would be well if we called the police—"

"How? We can't just leave him lying here, nor can we move him, and where would we find a telephone?"

He rose and dusted the knees of his trousers. "I think I see a gleam of light in that doorway. Perhaps they have a phone."

The neighborhood was strange to me. We had been visiting the Westervelt Clinic to observe the effect of a course of chiropractic treatments on a neurasthenic for whom potassium iodide and sodium salicylate had proved about as efficacious as so much distilled water. The old house occupied by the Clinic stood in what was little better than a slum and the old street through which we drove had seen better days, but not for a long time. Most of the houses were old brownstone fronts that had been elegant homes but now were shabby, run down at the heel, like gentlefolk in reduced circumstances. Signs announcing furnished rooms showed in most of the windows; on window-sills were half-filled milk bottles and the oddments common to "light housekeeping" apartments. Although it was but little after ten o'clock no lights showed in the blank-eyed windows. Either everyone had gone to bed or residents of the block economized on electricity.

However, as I followed the line of his pointed finger I saw a faint gleam seeping from the house before which we had stopped. A dull pattern of reds and blues lay on its white marble stoop where light shone dimly through the little panels of its stained-glass door, and though the place showed the air of decay that sat like a blight on the neighborhood it seemed a little better than its mates. None of its window lights had been broken and patched, it bore no card announcing rooms to let; the very curtains which obscured the light within seemed to announce it still maintained some sort of aloofness from the forthright poverty of the locality.

I started toward the dimly lighted door, but a sharp ejaculation from de Grandin halted me. "What is it?"

He had turned the dead man's face toward him and was staring at a small wound on the forehead with a look of fascination. "One cannot surely say," he answered softly, "but— What do you make of him, *hein?*"

Heading by BORIS DOLGOV

"Why, when he fell he struck his brow—"

"On what, one asks to know? What is there in the street on which he could have cut himself?" As I bent to inspect the wound he added: "And if he cut himself when he fell, why should his injury take this form, *hein?*" With a wisp of paper napkin

from the glove compartment of the car he wiped the corpse's brow, revealing not a straight or jagged cut, but three distinct incisions in the skin, clear-cut as if made with a needle or knife-point.

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed. "It looks like shorthand."

"It does, indeed," he agreed, "but it is not. Unless I miss my guess it is an Arabic inscription, perhaps Hindustani. I cannot be quite sure which."

"Arabic—Hindustani?" I echoed incredulously. "What would that be doing on a man's forehead—"

"Tiens, mon vieux, what would a man be doing falling dead in the street, with or without an inscription cut into his brow? *Le bon Dieu* knows, not I. Did not it seem to you he fled from something—"

"No, it didn't," I denied. "It seemed to me that he was drunk and didn't know what he was doing. Certainly, he wasn't watching his step—"

"Agreed," he nodded. "Most certainly he had not his wits about him, but few people *in extremis* do. However, let us wait the findings of the coroner. Our first concern is to find a telephone."

I JERKED the silver-plated handle of the old-fashioned bell-pull vigorously, and from somewhere in the rear of the house came a responsive brassy tinkle, but no more. *"Grand Dieu des porcs,"* de Grandin swore, "are we to be kept waiting while they rise and make a toilette like that of Marie Antoinette? *Hola dans la maison!"* he supplemented my ring with a vigorous thump upon the walnut panel of the door. "Awake, arouse yourselves within!" he shouted, and as he struck the door a second time a light click sounded and the portal swung back under the impact of his knuckles.

I hesitated on the threshold, but de Grandin had no scruples about violating the householders' privacy. *"Hola!"* he exclaimed again as he stepped over the sill. "Is there no one here to—*morbleu!"* he broke off, then, in a lower tone, *"Pas possible?* In such a neighborhood? *Regardez,* if you please, Friend Trowbridge."

We stood upon the entrance of a wide, long hall with frescoed ceiling and tall doors of massive walnut letting off to right and left. In the softly diffused light of a bronze-shaded Oriental lamp it seemed unreal as a stage setting—Persian, Indian and Chinese rugs almost hid the polished planking of the floor, more rugs, glowing with jewel-colors shading from pale jade to deepest ruby, draped along the walls. Where the white and mahogany balustrade of a wide staircase curved upward a peacock screen had been set, and immediately in front of it was a carved divan of inlaid blackwood. By the divan stood a tabouret of Indian cedar inlaid with copper, and on it, still emitting a thin plume of steam, a tiny cup of eggshell porcelain rested. Over everything there hung a heavy, heady, almost drugging perfume—ambergris.

"Tenez," de Grandin clicked his tongue against his teeth as he surveyed the apartment, "he is like a diamond set in brass or a pearl in a pig's snout, a room like this in such a neighborhood, *n'est-ce-pas?* One wonders—*ah-ha? Ah-ha-ha?"* His voice sank to a whisper as he nodded toward the stairway.

The blackwood divan just beneath the stairs was spread with leopard skin, and lying indolently on it was a woman, one arm extended toward us, wrist bent, hand drooping. Beneath her fingers coiled the brass stem of a *hookah* she had evidently let drop when she slipped off to sleep, and from the brass tobacco-cup that topped the cloisonné water-jar of the hubble-bubble the faintest coil of scented smoke ascended.

I had an odd feeling of unreality, a sort of this-can't-possibly-be-true sensation as I looked at her. She matched her surroundings as perfectly as if she had been made up for a part, and the big, gorgeous, dimly lighted room were the stage on which she played it. Small she was, almost childishly so, and dainty as a sweetly molded porcelain figurine. But her body was a woman's, not a child's. The turn of her bare arms, the firm rondure of her breasts, spoke full maturity. Her skin was golden with the warm glow of sun-ripened fruit, her nose was small and slightly hawk-beaked, her forehead low and wide. Her hair was black and sooty, without luster, parted smoothly in the middle and drawn down like wings above her ears, and the pandanus-red mouth was full-lipped,

sensual and petulant, suggesting quick transitions from gay laughter to storms of anger, like that of a willful child.

A short, tight bodice of plum-colored satin like a zouave jacket covered but in nowise concealed the luscious fullness of her bosoms, from waist to ankles she was encased in exaggeratedly full pantaloons of saffron-yellow muslin drawn in tightly at the bottoms and ending in a triple row of fluffy ruffles. About her neck and wrists and ankles circled strands of gold discs almost large as pennies set with uncut rubies and off-color diamonds, and from each plate hung a tiny golden sleigh-bell. In her left nostril was a hoop of gold large and heavy as a wedding ring, and balanced on the tip of one small foot was a green-velvet heelless slipper thickly worked with gold embroidery and seed-pearls. Its mate had fallen to the rug-strewn floor, baring a tiny blue-veined foot the heel and sole and toes of which were stained bright red with henna.

"Pardonnez-moi, Madame," de Grandin began, speaking softly so as not to waken her abruptly. "We regret the intrusion, but —*ah?*" We had been walking toward the sleeping woman, our footsteps soundless on the rug-spread floor, now we stood beside her. Her heavy-lashed, kohl-shadowed lids were not quite closed. A little thread of white showed between them, and her petulantly sensuous mouth was lax and drooping at the corners, as though she was unutterably tired. *"Morbleu,"* he exclaimed, and his voice rasped as if his throat were sandy, "another?"

"How—" I began, but he shut me off impatiently. *"Par la barbe d'un bouc vert,* do not you see it, my friend? There is something devilish here!" Scratched on the smooth, pale-amber skin of her forehead were the same shorthand-like characters we had found on the brow of the dead man in the street.

"What can it mean?" I wondered. "The wounds are fresh—the man, was still bleeding, this was probably made after death, for there's no evidence of hemorrhage, but she can't have been dead long. The coffee cup is still steaming, the *hookah* is smoking—"

"God and the devil know, not we, my friend," the little Frenchmen answered. "This case is not for the coroner alone. It is a matter for the police and the public prosecutor. Unless I am far more mistaken than I think, this is a matter of murder."

"YOU fellers do send in the damnedest cases," complained Dr. Jason Parnell, the coroner's physician. "I don't mind 'em when they're messed up some, or even when they're ripe from bein' in the Bay too long, but when they're dead without a single, solitary reason—"

"How do you say?" de Grandin demanded. "Is it that you could not make a diagnosis?"

"That's a rough outline of the plot. A first-year student knows that death begins in one of three ways: Coma, starting at the brain; asphyxia, beginning at the lungs, or syncope, commencing at the heart. Those bodies you found have no right to be dead. There's absolutely nothing diagnostic. No trace of coma, syncope or asphyxia. The man had a slight touch of TB, but he'd have been good for another five years, anyway. The woman showed traces of drug-addiction, but nothing which could account for her death. Except for those dam', insignificant scratches on their foreheads neither of 'em had a thing wrong with him: certainly nothing that the wildest stretch of imagination could call fatal. Hearts, lungs, brains all intact, no trace of any known poison, nothing serious the matter with 'em, except that they're both dead as herrings.

"Ye say there wuzn't any trace o' poison, sor?" Lieutenant Costello of the Homicide Bureau asked in disappointment. "Sure, that's too bad entirely. I'd kind o' built me case around them scratches on their foreheads—"

"I didn't say there was no trace of poison," Parnell denied tartly. "I said there was no trace of known poison. Generally speaking, poisons fall into three categories: corrosives, such as phenol or carbolic acid, hydrocyanic acid, or oxalic acid; hypnotics and antipyretics, such as the derivatives of opium, alcohol, chloroform and the like, and alkaloidals, which affect the central nervous system, among which many snake venoms are to be found. Usually we suspect some class of poison from the physical appearance of the body. From a general classification we descend to particulars, gradually

eliminating one suspected toxin, then another, till we've narrowed our investigation down to the particular poison causing death. Like you, when I found nothing radically wrong with these peoples' hearts or lungs or brains I suspected poison had been introduced into their systems through those scratches on their foreheads, but I drew a blank there, too.

"The area around the wounds should have been swollen, red and inflamed if snake venom had been introduced; these scratches seemed to have no effect on surrounding tissue, and specimens taken from them proved almost completely sterile. If one of the vegetable poisons such as curare had been injected symptoms similar to snake-bite would have been noticed, but as I said there were none. Furthermore, tests made on the blood and tissues yielded negative results. None of the familiar reactions was noted. All this, of course, does not preclude the possibility of poisoning. It merely means no poison known to me was used."

"Uh-huh," agreed Costello doubtfully. "What're ye goin' to tell the jury wuz the cause o' death, sor?"

Dr. Parnell drew out his wallet and extracted a ten-dollar bill which he laid on the desk before the policeman. "If you'll tell me what I should tell 'em that's yours, Lieutenant," he offered.

"*Tenez,* my friends, I think we waste the time," de Grandin broke in. "The key to this accursed mystery must lie under some doormat. Our task is to discover which one."

"True fer ye, sor," agreed Costello. "All we gotta do is find out why two people who didn't die from any known cause is dead, an' who kilt 'em, an' why. Afther that it's all simple. Where do we start turnin' up them doormats ye was spakin' of, I dunno?"

The little Frenchman took his narrow chin between his thumb and forefinger. "The markings on their brows are identical," he murmured. "If they had been different it might have meant something, or nothing. Their identity undoubtlessly means something, also, but what?" Abruptly he turned on us, small, round blue eyes blazing almost angrily. "Why do we stand here?" he demanded. "Why do we not go to consult the good Ram Chitra Das at once, right away, immediately?"

"WELL, well, this is an unexpected pleasure!" our Hindu friend greeted as we trooped into his apartment in East Eighty-sixth Street. He and his charming wife were lunching on the tiny tiled terrace that let off of the dining room of their maisonette, a spot of grateful coolness in the sweltering city. A red-and-white striped awning kept the mid-September sun at bay, the tiled floor was a cool gray-green underfoot, at the terrace edge a row of scarlet geraniums nodded in the light breeze fanning in from the East River. The buhl table from which they ate was itself a museum piece, and the covered dishes of Georgian Sheffield plate were, I noted enviously, the kind about which antique dealers dream. Steam spiraled lazily from the swan's-neck spout of a teapot under which a spirit lamp burned, iced grapefruit, chops, scrambled eggs and buttered toast had just been set before them, and at the far side of the table, beaded like the forehead of a farmhand on a summer day, a tall, inviting bottle of Rhine wine waited.

"Had luncheon?" asked our host. "Yes? That's a pity. We'd love to have you join us, but perhaps you'd take a cup o' tea?"

He smiled at the woman who sat facing us. "You remember Drs. Trowbridge and de Grandin, and Lieutenant Costello, my dear?"

Nairini inclined her head in a bow that included us jointly, and there was something queenly in the movement. I knew that she had been an Indian prince's daughter who had eloped from her bridegroom's palace with Ram Chitra Das, himself the grandson of a rajah and as engaging a scapegrace as ever backslid from the ancient Hindu faith and took service with His Britannic Majesty.

They were an oddly contrasting, yet completely complementary couple, these renegade children of Mother India. In his gray flannels with the bright stripes of his school tie in bold contrast, Ram Chitra Das looked anything but a Hindu. He might have been a Spaniard or Italian, perhaps a Basque or Portuguese, but there was nothing Oriental in his clear-olive complexion, his sleekly brushed black hair and humorous, alert dark eyes.

Nairini, on the contrary, could never have been mistaken for a Westerner. Her skin

was an incredibly beautiful tan, as if it had been powdered with the finest gold, her eyes of deep, moss-agate green were set a trifle slantingly, and her hair, demurely parted in the middle and gathered in a great coil at the back was a dull black cloud. Her mouth was an extraordinary color, like the darker sort of strawberries. Her dress of block-printed linen, chocolate-brown on cocoa-tan, was sleeveless and reached to her ankles, about her waist was a girdle of amber beads as large as hazel nuts. There were bracelets of frail silver filigree on her wrists, jade-and-silver pendants hung in her ears; a soft, musical cling-clong sounded as she moved slightly, and we saw the slender bare ankles above her sandaled feet were ringed with heavy circlets of sand-molded silver.

With a grace that made the simple act seem like the art of a skilled dancer she poured tea for us, and Ram Chitra Das demanded, "I suppose you chaps are in trouble again? We never see you when the sailin's clear."

"Not so much in trouble as puzzled, my friend," de Grandin denied. "Last night Friend Trowbridge and I found two people dead without excuse."

Ram Chitra Das bent a mild frown upon the little Frenchman. "Let's see if I follow you. D'ye mean you'd no excuse for findin' 'em, or the late lamented had no adequate excuse for dyin'?"

"Both, *par les bois d'une huître!*" Briefly de Grandin sketched our adventure of the night before, ending with Parnell's failure to ascribe a cause of death.

"H'm." Ram Chitra Das helped himself to more scrambled egg and spread strawberry jam on his toast. "You say the scars on their foreheads looked like writin'? Sounds as if some o' my former fellow countrymen might have been up to tricks. Can you recall what the scars looked like?"

"By blue, I can, my friend. I have here an exact copy." The Frenchman drew a slip of paper from his pocket and handed it to Ram Chitra Das.

"Sivanavama!" For a moment our host's hand shook as he looked at the sketch, but in a moment it had steadied.

Nairini's delicately arched brows rose a trifle higher. "What is it?" she asked in her clear, smooth contralto that somehow reminded me of the cooing of doves.

"I fear, old dear, that this is it." Her husband's voice was so casual that we knew he held hysteria in check by an effort as he passed the slip of paper to her.

"Oom Parvati!" The superb gentility that comes from hundreds of generations of royal blood stood Nairini in good stead, but in the sudden widening of her pupils and the quick expansion of her narrow nostrils we read fear.

"Ah-ha!" de Grandin barked. "You know him? You recognize him, *hein?*"

Ram Chitra Das nodded grimly. "We know him very well indeed."

"And what, if one may ask, does he mean, this writing?"

"Oh, the writing? Literally translated it means 'The Afghan.' "

"Vraiment? And who would this so odious Afghan be?"

Ram Chitra Das' dark eyes were serious as he turned them on de Grandin. "You know something about me," he returned. "You know my father was a prince's son who made a misalliance with a *nautchni* and went into a not too onerous exile as a consequence; you know about my education. I was brought up as a high caste Brahmin lad and in addition had some trainin' under fakirs who, as the saying goes, could 'teach tricks to a fox.' They certainly taught me some things that have come in very handy. My English education was interrupted by the World War, but when I came back from France I took my degree at Oxford and topped it off with a year at the Sorbonne."

The grin with which he broke his recital had something of a small-boy-at-the-circus quality. "So there I was, schooled Orientally and Occidentally, restless with the restlessness of all demobbed soldiers, and with not a blessed thing to do. My caste had been completely smashed by my trip across the ocean and such indiscretions as eating beef, and after fourteen years of European life in peace and war Brahma, Vishnu and Siva meant no more to me than Pegasus or Apollo, nor had I filled this vacuum of disbelief by embracing Christianity, though several parsons and the Lord knows how many nice old ladies had labored manfully to bring me into the fold. I didn't need to

work, my income was sufficient for my needs and almost equal to my wants, but I was bored. Bored stiff. I got so tired of being just Ram Chitra Das, idler, that I took service with the Intelligence Section of the Indian Police.

"I don't think that I'm boastin' when I say they got a bargain in me. I spoke every dialect that's used between Colombo and Kabul, and since I owed allegiance to no formal brand of religion and had no caste to be broken I could masquerade as a Hindu, Mohammedan, Jain, Buddhist, Sikh or Parsee without embarrassment. I gave 'em twenty-seven shillin's' worth for every pound they paid me. Besides, I had a lot of fun."

THEN suddenly he drew his brows down and the whole aspect of his face changed. "They gave me an assignment to keep an eye on Karowlee Sahib, the pershwa of Bahadupore. He was a tricky old cuss, this Raja Karowlee, somewhere about fifty, more wives than any other possessions—though they said he used about ten pecks o' diamonds for playthings. When he's not thinkin' of women it's treason; makin' deals with Russia or the Afghans, anyone who'll play his game and give him a leg up with his schemes. That's how he got his nickname, The Afghan. He'd spent almost a year up north o' Kabul tryin' to sell one of those Afghan amirs the idea of comin' down and botherin' the Raja while he pulled off his local revolution, and when he came back he had a pack o' Afghan wolfhounds, a lot less money than he took away, and his beard dyed red with henna, Afghan fashion. He'd had no luck with the hillmen, though. Seems the amir's son had served with the British and seen the R.A.F. in action. He wasn't havin' any trouble with *those* babies.

"Well, as I was sayin', I was up Bahadupore way, posin' as a free-lance soldier and servin' as a lieutenant in Karowlee's guard when word comes that the Princess Mihri Nairini—that means Nairini the Beloved—was comin' up from Bhutanistan, where her father was in the king business in a small way, to marry this old reprobate Karowlee. Women didn't mean much to me in those days. I'd been petted by the English ladies and the French girls were nice to me, too, but I'd never seen one who could lure me into exchangin' ridin' boots and polo mallet for slippers and a pipe. Besides, I'd absorbed European ideas. This Princess Nairini was a 'native,' probably ate with her fingers and couldn't read or write. I'd seen her kind a thousand times, and the more I saw of 'em the more I thought my pater had the right idea when he married a *nautchni*. Then—" he paused with a slow, reminiscent smile, and Nairini cut in softly:

"Then I captured him."

"Qu'est-ce donc?" de Grandin demanded. "How do you say, *Madame?"*

She smiled at him and two deep dimples showed in her cheeks, a merrily incongruous combination with her exotic eyes. "There'd been every kind of merrymaking in the palace for three days, and I was almost tired to death. I'd slipped away from my attendants and gone down to the garden to sit by the lotus pool when I saw someone coming toward me in the moonlight. He wore the red tunic and gold-and-red turban of an officer in Karowlee's Guard, and was very beautiful. He carried a light cane with which he switched the heads off of the flowers bordering the path. Flowers always seemed like living, sentient things to me, not merely vegetables, and I couldn't bear to see him behead them. 'Stop that!' I ordered sharply, and he halted as if he had walked into a brick wall."

"Why not?" demanded Ram Chitra Das. "There I was, attendin' to my guardin', when a houri out o' the False Prophet's Paradise tells me to stop it. High caste Hindu women, like *Muslimmi*, observe *purdah*, you know—veil themselves before strange men. This girl wore no veil, but plainly she was neither a *nautchni* nor a palace servant. 'Who are you?' I asked and she told me, 'Your future queen who orders you to cease destroyin' her flowers.'

"That started it. The next night I was there, and the next night after that. So was she, and we had other things to talk about than flowers. I was windin' up my tour of duty, about ready to sneak back to headquarters, and when I left Nairini went with me."

"One understands," de Grandin grinned delightedly with a Frenchman's innate appreciation of romance. "And then?"

Ram Chitra Das grinned back. "Since then it's been a game o' tag. Karowlee's a revengeful old devil, and I rather think we made him lose face by elopin'. Two or three times his agents almost got us. Once I found a cobra in my bath in Calcutta where no cobra had a right to be; scorpions have appeared mysteriously in my boots, I nearly stopped a bullet one night when Nairini and I were ridin' outside Bombay. When they transferred me to duty in London, smellin' out sedition among Indian sailors in the neighborhood of East India Dock Road, I thought we'd shaken off pursuit, but one night—we were livin' in St. James' Park where you'd no more look for a Hindu than for a rich man in heaven—what should turn up in our bed but a krait, a little cousin to the cobra, less than a tenth his size and more than twenty times as deadly. Then we knew the heat was on again, as you say in America."

DE GRANDIN nodded. "And you associate this brand upon the dead ones' foreheads with Karowlee Sahib?"

"Definitely. He's known as The Afghan from Cape Comorin to the Himalayas. Furthermore, elopements from his household ain't as rare as might be expected. His women are so numerous that he can't give 'em much attention. They get bored, and in India as in Ireland or Idaho there are always Boy Scouts ready to do their good deed by entertainin' bored wives. Sometimes these johnnies get serious and marry the gals—at least they run off with 'em.

"Usually Karowlee Sahib calls the turn on 'em before they get far. A year ago his agents killed a young Parsee who'd offered his protection to one of his runaway women, and disfigured the girl so that she committed suicide. That was in the outskirts of Benares, but instances of his revenge have been reported in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. We know from personal experience he can reach across the ocean. I think it altogether likely the man who dropped dead before your car and the woman you found dead in the house were victims of his vengeance."

De Grandin stroked his little wheat-blond mustache gently, then gave its ends a sudden savage tug. "Would you come with us to inspect these defunct ones?" he asked. "It may be you might recognize them."

"Be glad to, old chap. I doubt I'll know 'em, but we might find out something, and I've more than a mere academic interest in this case. My dear," he turned to Nairini, "I think you'd better come along. With Karowlee's playmates on the loose I'd feel much safer if I had you in sight—"

"Why not pack a bag and stop at my house?" I suggested. "You'll be nearer to your base of operations there, and in no greater danger—"

"Thank you, Dr. Trowbridge," he accepted. "If Karowlee's agents are in Harrisonville we'll force their hand by movin' in on 'em. Might as well have a showdown now as later."

"And did you find out anything helpful?" de Grandin asked Ram Chitra Das that evening after dinner as Nairini, looking if possible more beautiful than ever in a white dinner dress embroidered at the hem with golden lotuses, poured coffee for us in the drawing room.

"Quite," answered the Indian. "I skipped down to the morgue as you suggested and had a look at the *corpora delicti*. I didn't recognize the woman, but the man was William Archer Thurmond, much better known to the Criminal Investigation Department as 'The Snapper,' from his playful little habit of snapping up any unconsidered trifle left lying about. I got in touch with a friend at New Delhi by radio telephone, and he tells me The Snapper was last heard of in Bahadupore. That seems to match up. Evidently he was fascinated by the lady's charms, and quite as evidently she was one of Karowlee's women. They probably eloped, and if I know The Snapper she took something more than herself from the palace when she kept the rendezvous. Probably a quart or two of pearls or diamonds. So Karowlee wrote two more names down in his black books, and it seems his agents scored a double first this time."

"I agree," Jules de Grandin nodded. "For our part friend Costello and I ransacked the neighborhood of the strange deaths, ringing every doorbell in the street, and found out that a Hindu gentleman named Basanta Roy took a room not far from the house where the dead woman was found."

"Humpf," grunted Ram Chitra Das, "Basanta Roy, eh? There are about three hundred and twenty million people in India, accordin' to latest reports, and not less than five million of 'em are named Basanta Roy. Might as well be John Smith in London or Sam Cohen in New York, as far as identification goes."

"Nevertheless," de Grandin persisted, "this Monsieur Roy took lodgings in Thornapple Street. He was by all accounts a very old gentleman who wore a long white beard and kept much to himself, going out only after dark. He spoke English very well, but with an accent. Last night he came back to his room a little before midnight, paid two weeks' rent in lieu of notice, and decamped with bag and baggage."

"Aye?" Ram Chitra Das replied. "That may mean one of several things. Either he's satisfied with his job and gone back to India, or he's shifted operations from New Jersey to New York, hopin' to catch us off guard—eh? Oh, yes, dear, quite!"

Nairini had slipped the cap from her lipstick and leaned across the coffee table as if to rearrange the cups, in reality to scrawl on the mahogany with the cosmetic pencil:

"CAREFUL—ONE LISTENS AT THE WINDOW"

"As I was sayin'," Ray Chitra Das recommenced, but de Grandin interrupted. "Why do we not have some music, my friends? We have all night to talk about the case, let us defer our discussion till later. Will not you play for us, *Madame?* Your music? But of course, I shall be delighted to fetch it."

He hurried from the room and Nairini crossed to the piano, seated herself before the instrument and began to play softly, a slow, haunting tune pitched in a minor key, the heart-broken lament of an Afridi lover. The notes sank till they were no more than a soft murmur under her fingers. She bent forward toward the keyboard as if listening, waiting for something violent and dramatic.

"Trowbridge, Costello, Ram Chitra Das—*à moi!*" the little Frenchman's hail came from the garden. "I have him, me!"

We rushed through the French windows, vaulted down into the garden from the veranda and saw what seemed a vague, amorphous shadow draw suddenly in two parts, and heard de Grandin's jubilant announcement, *"C'est fini, mes amis.* He was a slippery eel, this one, but Jules de Grandin knows the fisherman's tricks. Yes, certainly."

FROM the midst of my Paul Scarlets he dragged something which upon inspection proved to be a small, gray-bearded man in a bad state of disrepair. Scratches from rose-thorns criss-crossed his face, his neat white-linen suit was soiled with black earth from the rose bed, the beautiful pale-green turban which had covered his shaved head had been jerked off to form a fetter for his hands.

"Go forward, thou!" the Frenchman ordered as he gave his captive a shove. "By blue, the one who tries to drive a knife in Jules de Grandin's ribs must get up before sunrise!"

"Well, as I live and breathe, if it's not Ajeit Swami!" exclaimed Ram Chitra Das as he inspected our prisoner. "Salaam, most reverend *Guru.* We must apologize for your reception, but as this gentleman has said, it is not thought good taste to try to stab a person in America." He gave a quick look at the knife de Grandin had dropped on the surgery table, and, "He didn't scratch you with this thing, did he?" he asked anxiously.

"Scratch me—me, Jules de Grandin?" snapped back the small Frenchman. *"Mordieu,* if you and I were not such friends I should be made to be insulted! Have I not said that he who would stab me—"

"Yes, yes; of course. Quite so. I'm glad he didn't nick you, though. I've seen these toad-prickers in action up Darjeeling way. Look." Taking up the short, curve-bladed dagger he grasped its handle in a quick grip, and from the tip of the steel shot a needle-fine jet of almost colorless liquid which hardened into a jellylike substance almost as soon as it struck the porcelain top of the examination table. "Ingenious little tool, eh, what?" he asked. "That's krait venom, my friend, if anyone should happen to ask you. One touch of it and you're a dead pigeon."

"Name of a small blue man, now I am angry!" exclaimed Jules de Grandin. "He has no sportsmanship, that one."

"I'll say he hasn't, agreed Ram Chitra Das. "The famous American formula of never giving a sucker an even break was developed by gentlemen of his profession several generations before Gutama Buddha came to spread the Light in Asia."

Abruptly he dropped his bantering manner. "The question is, what's to be done with him?"

"Why not let me run him in, sor?" volunteered Costello. "We can hold him on a charge of assault wid a dangerous weapon, an' suspicion o' murther—"

"No go," Ram Chitra Das shook his head. "It's true he tried to stab Dr. de Grandin, but it's also true Dr. de Grandin attacked him. As for the murder charge, no judge in the country would listen to it. The coroner's physician can't assign a cause of death. How'd we ever manage to connect him with those killin's in Thornapple Street?"

"Then ye're sure they wuz killin's, not natural deaths?" Costello responded.

"Sure?" The Indian grinned at him, then turned to the prisoner. "You polished off The Snapper and his girl friend in great shape, didn't you, Swami?"

The old man smiled at him almost benignly. "The power of the eye, Nana Sahib—"

"No names!" cut in the other sharply. "I'm just Ram Chitra Das, if you please."

"So be it," acquiesced the old man. "I cast the power of the eye on them and they died."

"H'm."

"*Que diable?*" demanded de Grandin. "Is it that he claims to have the Evil Eye?"

"Something like that," answered the Indian. Then, to me: "Have you some safe place we can stow him temporarily, Dr. Trowbridge?"

I thought a moment, then, "The garage?" I hazarded. "The car's out front, and we could shut him up there for a while."

"How about the windows?"

"There's only one, and I had bars put on that during the tire shortage when burglaries became so numerous."

"Good enough. Would you mind staying with Nairini—just in case—while we put this bird in his cage? Be with you in a moment."

"BUT that can't be, sor," I heard Costello remonstrate as they returned from securing the prisoner in the garage. "It's agin the order o' nature!"

"*Non, mon Lieutenant,* it are entirely possible, I do assure you," Jules de Grandin answered. "Ask good Friend Trowbridge if you doubt us."

"Could it be, sor?" dutifully complied Costello. "They're afther tellin' me a man can hypnotize hisself to death."

"What?" I demanded incredulously. "Hypnotize—"

"Perfectly, my old one," broke in de Grandin. "It are entirely possible. Ram Chitra Das affirms it, and while I think it unlikely, I think it could be so."

I turned from one of them to the other in confusion. "What in heaven's name is all this about?"

"Just this, sir," answered Ram Chitra Das, "this Swami Ajeit Singh is one of Raja Karowlee's chief wonder-workers. He's a skilled fakir, an adept at every brand o' magic known in India, and, of course, an expert hypnotist. He probably never heard of Baird or Mesmer, and never studied even elementary psychology, but when it comes to practical ability as a hypnotist I doubt if any of your best professionals could hold a candle to him.

"I take it you've seen experiments in hypnotism performed in the psychological laboratory or on the stage?"

I nodded, wondering what was coming next.

"Very well, sir. You've seen the operator make the subject become rigid, so that if his head is placed on one chair and his feet on another weights can be piled on his stomach to a degree he could not possibly support in consciousness?"

"Yes, I've seen that."

"Have you seen an operator make the blood go from one arm and run into the other till the skin threatens to burst?"

"Yes."

"And blood come through the skin as if a wound had been inflicted?"

"Yes," I nodded.

"And have not you seen the operator tell the subject to decrease his pulse-beat?" interjected Jules de Grandin. "Have not you seen pulsation at the hypnotist's command

sink from eighty beats a minute to sixty, fifty, or even forty?"

"Ye-es," I agreed doubtfully. "I seem to recall such a demonstration in Baltimore some years ago, but—"

"No buts, if you will be so kind. I ask you as a man of science, Friend Trowbridge, if it is possible to tell the human heart—which as we know is an involuntary muscle and takes no orders from the conscious mind—to beat more slowly, is it not possible to tell it to cease beating altogether?"

"Well, I—"

"Do not evade the logic of the question, if you please, my friend. You have admitted seeing pulsation slowed down, even though the action of the heart is altogether involuntary. If it can be slowed down by hypnotic suggestion, why can not it be stopped entirely?"

I saw the logical conclusion of his premises, but was not ready to capitulate. "How could the operator, by which I suppose you mean Ajeit Swami, gain control of his subjects?" I demanded. "We all agree that acquiescence is the prime factor in successful hypnotism. The subject must be willing—"

"*Non, dix mille fois, non*!" he disagreed. "Consent is not at all necessary. All that is required is a lack of opposition. That is why we use the lights, the mirrors, the upraised forefinger—anything to fix the subject's attention and divert him from a state of rebellion, from thinking 'I will not be hypnotized.'

"Consider, if you please: This Ajeit Singh Swami is a skilled hypnotist, as are all of his kind. He has a reputation as a wonder-worker throughout Northern India. Is it not so? Of course. Very well, then. The more his reputation grows the greater is his power. People fear him. They believe that he can do much more than he can in reality. They feel—by blue, they know—that it is useless to resist what they call his magic and we call his hypnotic power.

"*Très bon*. Where are we now? We are in the house in Thornapple Street occupied by Monsieur Snapper and his little pretty lady friend of unknown name. We see them sitting in that big, so lovely hall, in pleasant conversation. Perhaps they smoke the *hookah* together, it had more than one mouth-piece. Perhaps they drink the after dinner coffee. Perhaps they just make the love. She seemed to me the sort of person to whom it would not be difficult to whisper sweet nothings. *Ha*, they have fled across the ocean to America; they have buried themselves in a semi-slum. They fancy themselves immune from pursuit. They feel secure. Yes. And then, all suddenly, comes the Swami Ajeit Singh, the emissary of Karowlee Sahib, and tells them he is there to work his master's vengeance on them. Are they startled? *Parbleu*, they are what you call petrified. They know him, they fear him; they are powerless to resist him as the poor silly rabbit that sees the serpent slithering toward him. *Morbleu*, their chicken—*non*, their goose—is cooked! Yes, certainly; of course.

"THE woman falls into a trance at once when Swami Ajeit bids her sleep. He bids her heart beat more slowly, miss a beat, cease beating altogether. Yes. So it is. Monsieur Snapper, being English and a little stronger in the will, does not succumb so quickly. He resists a so little moment, hears the Swami bid the woman die, sees her expire, and he feels the uselessness of struggling; yet he does struggle—a little. When the Swami puts the brand of The Afghan on his forehead it rouses him, he still has the vitality to rise and try to flee.

"But he runs poorly, weakly. We saw him run across the sidewalk, and thought that he was drunk because he staggered so. *Hélas*, it was not so. He ran to sure and certain death, that one. With each step that he ran his mind repeated, 'Die—die—die!' When he had reached the curb he was no better than a running corpse. We saw him fall into the street. We did not know it, but we saw him die. The command to his heart to stop had followed him from the house to the street, it was impossible for him to outrun it as it would be for a horse to outrun his tail. Yes, it are indubitably so. It are not strange the good Parnell could find no cause of death. Those so unfortunate ones did not die; they merely ceased to live."

"I'm not convinced," I told him, "but even if we grant your argument, what are you going to do about it? You don't think

any jury would convict him on such testimony, do you?"

"I'm afraid he's got us in a forked stick," Ram Chitra Das admitted. "He couldn't work his hypnotism on Nairini or me, of course. We're too well versed in such things; but there are other little tricks he might try on us. I'd feel a lot more comfortable if he were out of the way. By Minakshi—"

The little Frenchman's short laugh broke through his sentence. "*Cordieu,* my friend, you have supplied the answer, I damn think!"

"What d'ye mean—"

"Your mention of Minakshi, the Fish-Eyed Goddess. Once when I was at Pondicherry I made the pilgrimage to Madura to witness the annual nuptials of Siva and Minakshi of the amethyst and emerald eyes —'The Fish-Eyed One' as she is known throughout India. I saw her image carried in a splendid bridal car, observed the great jeweled eyes in her serene face and said to me, 'Jules de Grandin, there is danger in those eyes of hers. A man might gaze too long at them and lose himself completely: become hypnotized. Does not the legend say even great Siva is enmeshed when he looks into them? There may be factual foundation for that legend, Jules de Grandin.' And so I looked away. I am a brave man, me, but I take no unnecessary chances. No."

Ram Chitra Das raised puzzled brows, but Costello was more forthright. "Is it completely daft ye've gone, sor?" he demanded.

"Daft—crazy?" answered Jules de Grandin with one of his quick elfin grins. "But yes, completely crazy, *mon Lieutenant*— crazy like the fox. Await me here, if you will be so kind." He hurried from the room and Costello turned to us with a Lord-save-my-sanity expression.

"What're ye goin' to do wid a leprechaun like that?" he asked helplessly. "Sometimes I think he's nutty as a fruitcake, then zowie! up he comes wid a idee that knocks ye for a loop."

THE patter of de Grandin's feet came from the hall and he bounced into the room with upraised hands. "Observe them, if you please, *mes enfants!*" he commanded. "Are they not superb?" Between the thumb and finger of each hand he held a disc of colored glass, its periphery marked by a zone of greenish-brown, its center by a dot of black. I recognized them as the glass eyes from a white bear rug that I had purchased in a thoughtless moment years before and relegated to the attic long since.

"What—" I began, but he cut me off with such a smug grin that I could have kicked him.

"*Regardez-moi,*" he ordered. From his jacket pocket he produced a lead tube which I recognized as the container of some luminous paint with which I'd had the house number marked some time before in order that late-calling patients could see it more easily. Squeezing a bit of the paint paste on the tip of a match he proceeded to overlay the cornea of the glass eyes with it, working with that neat, swift precision which distinguished everything he did.

"Turn out the lights, if you please," he directed, and as I complied we were plunged in Stygian darkness, for the lamps had been extinguished in the dining room and no moonlight filtered through the windows. "Observe me, closely, if you please," his command came through the dark, and as we watched twin spots of luminance began to glow, at first faintly, then with sharper definition, finally with a greenish-toned infernal blaze that seemed to give off wisps of smoke as if its fire fed on itself and needed no other fuel.

"Howly Moses!" exclaimed Costello. "Who'd 'a' thought it?"

The lights blazed on again and I let my breath out with a jerk, nor was it till then that I realized I'd been holding it. "You see?" he asked. "Are they not truly fascinating?"

"Call it that if ye wish, sor," answered Costello. "I got another name for it."

"Precisely, *mon Lieutenant.* So will he."

"He, sor? Who?"

"That wicked old man now incarcerated in Friend Trowbridge's garage. The one who tried to stab me with a poisoned dagger. Tonight we perform a most interesting experiment. We shall see how wickedness is turned against itself, how the power of suggestion may be made to rebound on him who exercises it for evil. Yes,

"Will you be kind enough to bring him from the garage?" he asked Costello and Ram Chitra Das.

"And now, my old and very wicked one," he told the fakir when they had brought him into the drawing room, "you killed Monsieur the Snapper and his little pretty lady companion by the power of the eye. Is it not so?"

"It is so," replied the old man with a smile of such supreme self-satisfaction that it was little less than a smirk. "Moreover, I am safe from any harm your laws can do me. No judge sahib in your country would believe I have the power—"

"*Précisément, mon vieux et mangé des vers,* but we believe—and so do you. Anon we put you in a sure, safe place, and presently there comes another who will share the darkness with you. Think on her and be afraid. Remember into whose eyes even great Siva may not look without loss of his will. Bid the blood run slow and slower in your veins, the heart beat weak and weaker in your breast until it beats no more."

He turned abruptly on his heel and left the room, but in a moment he returned and whispered to Costello and Ram Chitra Das, "Take him all quickly into the garage, my friends, and bind him so his face is toward the window. I have fixed the eyes against the wall beneath the sill."

"S'pose he won't look at 'em, sor?" Costello asked when he and the Indian returned from securing the prisoner. "He might shut his eyes or turn his head away—"

"We need not make ourselves uneasy on that score," de Grandin replied. "Human nature being what it is, a man can no more help turning his eyes toward a point of light in a dark room than he can keep from snapping his lids shut when someone pokes a finger at his face. Also, you recall how you were fascinated by the glow of those eyes in the dark. You knew what they were, yet you felt fear; he has no warning. He was told only, 'Presently another comes.' When he has been in the dark a few moments the eyes will begin glowing, it will be as if one came from outside—whether from outside the garage or from another world he will not know.

"But do you seriously think a man can command himself to stop living?" I asked.

"PERFECTLY," de Grandin cut in. "This Ajeit Swami may be a wise man, he may think he understands a great variety of things, but also he is very superstitious. He believes in magic. His is no coldly scientific mind. I planted the seed in his brain before they took him out. Fear—fear of the unknown, which is the greatest fear of all—will do the rest. We know the *ju-ju* of the African witch-doctor is powerless against the European because he does not believe in it, but even the educated native has active or latent superstitious dread of witchcraft, and in consequence, when he is told a spell has been put on him, he weakens, wastes away and dies, purely through the power of suggestion and the working of ingrained belief and fear. Yes, it is so."

Somewhat later he glanced at his watch and put down his glass. "An hour. It is time, I think, my friends. Come, let us go all quietly to the garage and observe what we shall observe."

Shortly after noon next day we ran into Dr. Parnell. "Hey, you fellers been up to some more monkey-business?" he demanded.

"Business of the monkey?" Jules de Grandin's face was blank as a brick wall. "How do you mean, *cher collègue?*"

Parnell eyed us suspiciously. "Well, I wouldn't put it past you two. The police found a dead man in the street not far from Trowbridge's this morning about three o'clock, and—"

"Yes, and—" de Grandin prompted as Parnell came to a pause.

"And I'd say he died of heart failure, except for one thing."

"And what is that one so small thing, if you please?"

"There's nothing wrong with his heart. It's sound as a dollar."

"*Tenez,*" de Grandin tweaked the ends of his mustache, "perhaps he autohypnotized himself to death, *cher collègue.* Will not you join us in a drink? You look as if you could use one, as *le bon Dieu* knows I can and shall."

Lizzie Borden Took An Axe . . .

By ROBERT BLOCH

Yes, horror comes at midnight, born of whispers out of dreams

"Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks
When she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one."

• • • • • •

MEN SAY that horror comes at midnight, born of whispers out of dreams. But horror came to me at high noon, heralded only by the prosaic jangling of a telephone.

I had been sitting in the office all morning, staring down the dusty road that led to the hills. It coiled and twisted before my aching eyes as a shimmering sun played tricks upon my vision. Nor were my eyes the only organs that betrayed me; something about the heat and the stillness seemed to invade my brain. I was restless, irritable, disturbed by a vague presentiment.

The sharp clangor of the phone bell crys-

Heading by LEE BROWN COYE

tallized my apprehension in a single, strident note.

My palms dripped perspiration-patterns across the receiver. The phone was a warm, leaden weight against my ear. But the voice I heard was cold; icy cold, frozen with fear. The words congealed.

"Jim—come and help me!"

That was all. The receiver clicked before I could reply. The phone slid to the desk as I rose and ran to the door.

It was Anita's voice, of course.

It was Anita's voice that sent me speeding towards my car; sent me racing down that desolate, heat-riddled road towards the old house deep in the hills.

Something had happened out there. Something was bound to happen, sooner or later. I'd known it, and now I cursed myself for not insisting on the sensible thing. Anita and I should have eloped weeks ago.

I should have had the courage to snatch her bodily away from this atmosphere of Faulkneresque melodrama, and I might have, if only I had been able to *believe* in it.

At the time it all seemed so improbable. Worse than that, it seemed *unreal*.

There are no legend-haunted houses looming on lonely hillsides. Yet Anita lived in one.

There are no gaunt, fanatical old men who brood over black books; no "hex doctors" whose neighbors shun them in superstitious dread. Yet Anita's uncle, Gideon Godfrey, was such a man.

Young girls cannot be kept virtual prisoners in this day and age; they cannot be forbidden to leave the house, to love and marry the man of their choice. Yet Anita's uncle had her under lock and key, and our wedding was prohibited.

Yes, it was all sheer melodrama. The whole affair struck me as ridiculous when I thought about it; but when I was with Anita, I did not laugh.

When I heard Anita talk about her uncle, I almost believed; not that he had supernatural powers, but that he was cunningly, persistently attempting to drive her mad.

That's something you can understand, something evil, yet tangible.

There was a trust fund, and Gideon Godfrey was Anita's legal guardian. He had her out there in his rotting hulk of a house—completely at his mercy. It might easily occur to him to work on her imagination with wild stories and subtle confirmations.

Anita told me. Told me of the locked rooms upstairs where the old man sat mumbling over the mouldering books he'd hidden away there. She told me of his feuds with farmers, his open boastings of the "hex" he put on cattle, the blights he claimed to visit upon crops.

Anita told me of her dreams. Something black came into her room at night. Something black and inchoate—a trailing mist that was nevertheless a definite and tangible presence. It had features, if not a face; a voice, if not a throat. It whispered.

And as it whispered, it caressed her. She would fight off the inky strands brushing her face and body; she would struggle to summon the scream which dispelled spectre and sleep simultaneously.

Anita had a name for the black thing, too.

She called it an *incubus*.

In ancient tracts on witchcraft, the incubus is mentioned—the dark demon that comes to women in the night. The black emissary of Satan the Tempter; the lustful shadow that rides the nightmare.

I knew of the incubus as a legend. Anita knew of it as a reality.

Anita grew thin and pale. I knew there was no magic concerned in her metamorphosis—confinement in that bleak old house was alchemy enough to work the change. That, plus the sadistically-inspired hintings of Gideon Godfrey, and the carefully calculated atmosphere of dread which resulted in the dreams.

But I had been weak. I didn't insist. After all, there was no real proof of Godfrey's machinations, and any attempt to bring issues to a head might easily result in a sanity hearing for Anita, rather than the old man.

I felt that, given time, I would be able to make Anita come away with me voluntarily.

And now, there was no time.

Something had happened.

The car churned dust from the road as I turned in towards the tottering gambrels of

the house on the hillside. Through the flickering heat of a midsummer afternoon, I peered at the ruined gables above the long porch.

I swung up the drive, shot the car past the barn and side-buildings, and parked hastily.

No figure appeared at the open windows, and no voice called a greeting as I ran up the porch steps and paused before the open door. The hall within was dark. I entered heedless of knocking, and turned towards the parlor.

Anita was standing there, waiting, on the far side of the room. Her red hair was disheveled about her shoulders; her face was pale—but she was obviously unharmed. Her eyes brightened when she saw me.

"Jim—you're here!"

She held out her arms to me, and I moved across the room to embrace her.

As I moved, I stumbled over something.

I looked down.

Lying at my feet was the body of Gideon Godfrey—the head split open and crushed to a bloody pulp.

2.

THEN Anita was sobbing in my arms, and I was patting her shoulders and trying not to stare at the red horror on the floor.

"Help me," she whispered, over and over again. "Help me!"

"Of course I'll help you," I murmured. "But—what happened?"

"I don't—know."

"You don't *know?*"

Something in my intonation sobered her. She straightened up, pulled away, and began dabbing at her eyes. Meanwhile she whispered on, hastily.

"It was hot this morning. I was out in the barn. I felt tired and dozed off in the hayloft. Then, all at once, I woke up and came back into the house. I found—him—lying here."

"There was no noise? Nobody around?"

"Not a soul."

"You can see how he was killed," I said, "Only an axe could do such a job. But—where is it?"

She averted her gaze. "The axe? I don't know. It should be beside the body, if somebody killed him."

I turned and started out of the room.

"Jim—where are you going?"

"To call the police, naturally," I told her.

"No, you can't. Don't you see? If you call them now, they'll think *I* did it."

I could only nod. "That's right. It's a pretty flimsy story, isn't it, Anita? If we only had a weapon; fingerprints, or footsteps, some kind of clue—"

Anita sighed. I took her hand. "Try to remember," I said, softly. "You're sure you were out in the barn when this happened? Can't you remember more than that?"

"No, darling. It's all so confused, somehow. I was sleeping—I had one of my dreams—the black thing came—"

I shuddered. I knew how *that* statement affected me, and I could imagine the reaction of the police. She was quite mad, I was sure of it; and yet another thought struggled for realization. Somehow I had the feeling that I had lived through this moment before. Pseudo-memory. Or had I heard of it, read of it?

Read of it? Yes, that was it!

"Try hard, now," I muttered. "Can't you recall how it all began? Don't you know why you went out to the barn in the first place?"

"Yes. I think I can remember. I went out there for some fishing sinkers."

"Fishing sinkers? In the barn?"

Something clicked, after all. I stared at her with eyes as glassy as those of the corpse on the floor.

"Listen to me," I said. "You're not Anita Loomis. You're—Lizzie Borden!"

She didn't say a word. Obviously the name had no meaning for her. But it was all coming back to me now; the old, old story, the unsolved mystery.

I guided her to the sofa, sat beside her. She didn't look at me. I didn't look at her. Neither of us looked at the thing on the floor. The heat shimmered all around us in the house of death as I whispered the story to her—the story of Lizzie Borden—

3.

IT WAS early August of the year 1892. Fall River, Massachusetts lay gasping in the surge of a heat-wave.

The sun beat down upon the home of Fall River's leading citizen, the venerable Andrew Jackson Borden. Here the old man dwelt with his second wife, Mrs. Abby Borden; stepmother of the two girls, Emma and Lizzie Borden. The maid, Bridget "Maggie" Sullivan, completed the small household. A house guest, John V. Morse, was away at this time, visiting. Emma, the older Borden girl, was also absent.

Only the maid and Lizzie Borden were present on August 2nd, when Mr. and Mrs. Borden became ill. It was Lizzie who spread the news—she told her friend, Marion Russell, that she believed their milk had been poisoned.

But it was too hot to bother, too hot to think. Besides, Lizzie's ideas weren't taken very seriously. At 32, the angular, unprepossessing younger daughter, was looked upon with mixed opinion by the members of the community. It was known that she was "cultured" and "refined"—she had travelled in Europe; she was a churchgoer, taught a class in a church mission, and enjoyed a reputation for "good work" as a member of the WCTU and similar organizations. Yet some folks thought her temperamental, even eccentric. She had "notions."

So the illness of the elder Bordens was duly noted and ascribed to natural causes; it was impossible to think about anything more important than the omnipresent heat, and the forthcoming Annual Picnic of the Fall River Police Department, scheduled for August 4th.

On the 4th the heat was unabated, but the picnic was in full swing by 11 o'clock—the time at which Andrew Jackson Borden left his downtown office and came home to relax on the parlor sofa. He slept fitfully in the noonday swelter.

Lizzie Borden came in from the barn a short while later and found her father asleep no longer.

Mr. Borden lay on the sofa, his head bashed in so that his features were unrecognizable.

Lizzie Borden called the maid, "Maggie" Sullivan, who was resting in her room. She told her to run and fetch Dr. Bowen, a near neighbor. He was not at home.

Another neighbor, a Mrs. Churchill, happened by. Lizzie Borden greeted her at the door.

"Someone has killed father," were Lizzie's words.

"And where is your mother?" Mrs. Churchill asked.

Lizzie Borden hesitated. It was hard to think in all this heat. "Why—she's out. She received a note to go and help someone who is sick."

Mrs. Churchill didn't hesitate. She marched to a public livery stable and summoned help. Soon a crowd of neighbors and friends gathered; police and doctors were in attendance. And in the midst of the growing confusion, it was Mrs. Churchill who went directly upstairs to the spare room.

Mrs. Borden rested there, her head smashed in.

By the time Dr. Dolan, the coroner, arrived, questioning was already proceeding. The Chief of Police and several of his men were on hand, establishing the fact that there had been no attempt at robbery. They began to interrogate Lizzie.

Lizzie Borden said she was in the barn, eating pears and looking for fishing sinkers—hot as it was. She dozed off, was awakened by a muffled groan, and came into the house to investigate. There she had found her father's hacked body. And that was all—

Now her story of a suspected poisoning was recalled, with fresh significance. A druggist said that a woman had indeed come into his shop several days before and attempted to procure some prussic acid—saying she needed it to kill the moths in her fur coat. She had been refused, and informed by the proprietor that she needed a doctor's prescription.

The woman was identified, too—as Lizzie Borden.

Lizzie's story of the note summoning her mother away from the house now came in for scrutiny. No such note was ever discovered.

Meanwhile, the investigators were busy. In the cellar, they discovered a hatchet with a broken handle. It appeared to have been recently washed, then covered with ashes. Water and ashes conceal stains. . . .

Shock, heat, and embarrassment all played

subtle parts in succeeding events. The police presently withdrew without taking formal action, and the whole matter was held over, pending an inquest. After all, Andrew Jackson Borden was a wealthy citizen, his daughter was a prominent and respectable woman, and no one wished to act hastily.

Days passed in a pall of heat and gossip behind sweaty palms. Lizzie's friend, Marion Russell, dropped in at the house three days after the crime and discovered Lizzie burning a dress.

"It was all covered with paint," Lizzie Borden explained.

Marion Russell remembered that dress —it was the one Lizzie Borden had worn on the day of the murders.

The inevitable inquest was held, with the inevitable verdict. Lizzie Borden was arrested and formally charged with the slayings.

The press took over. The church members defended Lizzie Borden. The sob-sisters made much of her. During the six months preceding the actual trial, the crime became internationally famous.

But nothing new was discovered.

During the thirteen days of the trial, the bewildering story was recounted without any sensational development.

Why should a refined New England spinster suddenly kill her father and stepmother with a hatchet, then boldly "discover" the bodies and summon the police?

The prosecution was unable to give a satisfactory answer. On June 20th, 1893, Lizzie Borden was acquitted by a jury of her peers, after one hour of deliberation.

She retired to her home and lived a life of seclusion for many, many years. The stigma had been erased, but the mystery remained unsolved with her passing.

Only the grave little girls remained, skipping their ropes and solemnly chanting:

"Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks
When she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one."

4.

THAT'S the story I told Anita—the story you can read wherever famous crimes are chronicled.

She listened without comment, but I could hear the sharp intake of breath as I recounted some singularly significant parallel. *The hot day . . . the barn . . . the fishing sinkers . . . a sudden sleep, a sudden awakening . . . the return to the house . . . discovery of a body . . . took an axe. . . .*

She waited until I had finished before speaking.

"Jim, why do you tell me this? Is it your way of hinting that I—took an axe to my uncle?"

"I'm not hinting anything," I answered. "I was just struck by the amazing similarity of this case and the Lizzie Borden affair."

"What do you think happened, Jim? In the Lizzie Borden case, I mean."

"I don't know," I said slowly. "I was wondering if you had a theory."

Her opal eyes glinted in the shadowed room. "Couldn't it have been the same thing?" she whispered. "You know what I've told you about my dreams. About the incubus.

"Suppose Lizzie Borden had those dreams, too. Suppose an entity emerged from her sleeping brain; an entity that would take up an axe and kill—"

She sensed my protest and ignored it. "Uncle Gideon knew of such things. How the spirit descends upon you in sleep. Couldn't such a presence emerge into the world while she slept and kill her parents? Couldn't such a being creep into the house here while I slept and kill Uncle Gideon?"

I shook my head. "You know the answer I must give you," I said. "And you can guess what the police would say to that. Our only chance now, before calling them, is to find the murder weapon."

We went out into the hall together, and hand in hand we walked through the silent ovens that were the rooms of this old house. Everywhere was dust and desolation. The kitchen alone bore signs of recent occupancy —they had breakfasted there early in the day, Anita said.

There was no axe or hatchet to be found anywhere.

It took courage to tackle the cellar. I was almost certain of what we must find. But Anita did not recoil, and we descended the dark stairwell.

The cellar did not yield up a single sharp instrument.

Then we were walking up the stairs to the second floor. The front bedroom was ransacked, then Anita's little room, and at last we stood before the door of Gideon Godfrey's chamber.

"It's locked," I said. "That's funny."

"No," Anita demurred. "He always kept it locked. The key must be downstairs with—him."

"I'll get it," I said. And I did so. When I returned with the rusty key, Anita stood quaking in the hallway.

"I won't go inside with you," she breathed. "I've never been inside his room. I'm afraid. He used to lock himself in and I'd hear sounds late at night—he was praying, but not to God—"

"Wait here, then," I said.

I unlocked the door, opened it, stepped across the threshold.

GIDEON GODFREY may have been a madman himself. He may have been a cunning schemer, bent on deluding his niece. But in either case, he did believe in sorcery.

That much was evident from the contents of his room. I saw the books saw the crudely drawn chalk circles on the floor; literally dozens of them, hastily obliterated and repeated endlessly. There were queer geometric configurations traced in blue chalk upon one of the walls, and candle-drippings covered walls and floor alike.

The heavy, fetid air held a faint, acrid reek of incense. I noted one sharp instrument in the room—a long silver knife lying on a side-table next to a pewter bowl. The knife seemed rusty, and the rust was red. . . .

But it was not the murder weapon, that was certain. I was looking for an axe, and it wasn't here.

I joined Anita in the hall.

"Isn't there anywhere else?" I asked, "Another room?"

"Perhaps the barn," she suggested.

"And we didn't really search in the parlor," I added.

"Don't make me go in there again," Anita begged. "Not in the same room where *he* is. You look there and I'll go through the barn."

We parted at the foot of the stairs. She went out the side entrance and I walked back into the parlor.

I looked behind the chairs, under the sofa. I found nothing. It was hot in there; hot and quiet. My head began to swim.

Heat—silence—and that grinning thing on the floor. I turned away, leaned against the mantel, and stared at my bloodshot eyes in the mirror.

All at once, I saw it, standing behind me. It was like a cloud—a black cloud. But it wasn't a cloud. It was a *face*. A face, covered by a black mask of wavering smoke; a mask that leered and pressed closer.

Through heat and silence it came, and I couldn't move. I stared at the swirling, cloudy smoke that shrouded a face.

Then I heard something swish, and I turned.

Anita was standing behind me.

As I grasped her wrists she screamed and fell. I could only stare down at her, stare down as the black cloud over her face disappeared, oozed into air.

The search was over. I'd found the murder weapon, all right; it rested rigidly in her hands—the bloodstained axe!

5.

I CARRIED Anita over to the sofa. She didn't move, and I made no attempt to revive her.

Then I went out into the hall, carrying the axe with me. No sense in taking any chances. I trusted Anita still, but not that thing—not that black mist, swirling up like smoke to take possession of a living brain and make it lust to kill.

Demoniac possession it was; the legend spoken of in ancient books like those in the room of the dead wizard.

I crossed the hall to the little study opposite the parlor. The wall telephone was here; I picked it up and rang the operator.

She got me the Highway Police headquarters. I don't know why I called them, rather than the sheriff. I was in a daze throughout the entire call. I stood there holding the axe in one hand, reporting the murder in a few words.

Questions rose from the other end of the wire; I did not answer them.

"Come on out to the Godfrey place," I said. "There's been a killing."

What else *could* I say?

What would we be telling the police, half an hour from now, when they arrived on the scene?

They wouldn't believe the truth—wouldn't believe that a demon could enter a human body and activate it as an instrument for murder.

But I believed it now. I had seen the fiend peering out of Anita's face when she tried to sneak up behind me with the axe. I had seen the black smoke, the conjuration of a demon lusting for bloody death.

Now I knew that it must have entered her as she slept; made her kill Gideon Godfrey.

Perhaps such a thing had happened to Lizzie Borden. Yes. The eccentric spinster with the over-active imagination, so carefully repressed; the eccentric spinster, sleeping in the barn on that hot summer day—

"Lizzie Borden took an axe
And gave her mother forty whacks"

I leaned back, the verse running through my head.

It was hotter than I had believed possible, and the stillness hinted of approaching storm.

I groped for coolness, felt the cold axe-blade in my hand as I leaned the weapon across my lap. As long as I held on to this, we were safe. The fiend was foiled, now. Wherever that presence lurked, it must be raging, for it could not take possession.

Oh, that was madness! The heat was responsible, surely. Sunstroke caused Anita to kill her uncle. Sunstroke brought on her babblings about an incubus and dreams. Sunstroke impelled that sudden, murderous attack upon me before the mirror.

Sympathetic hallucination accounted for my image of a face veiled by a black mist. It had to be that way. The police would say so, doctors would say so.

"When she saw what she had done
She gave her father forty-one."

Police. Doctors. Lizzie Borden. The heat. The cool axe. Forty whacks. . . .

. . .

6.

THE first crash of thunder awakened me. For a moment I thought the police had arrived, then realized that the heat-storm was breaking. I blinked and rose from the armchair. Then I realized that something was *missing*.

The axe no longer rested across my lap.

It wasn't on the floor. It wasn't visible anywhere. The axe had disappeared again!

"Anita," I gasped. I knew without conscious formulation of thought how it must have happened. She had awakened while I slept—come in here and stolen the axe from me.

What a fool I had been to sleep!

I might have guessed it . . . while she was unconscious, the lurking demon had another chance to gain possession. That was it; the demon had entered into Anita again.

I faced the door, stared at the floor, and saw my confirmation scrawled in a trail of red wetness dotting the carpet and outer hall.

It was blood. Fresh blood.

I rushed across the hall, re-entered the parlor.

Then I gasped, but with relief. For Anita was still lying on the couch, just as I had left her. I wiped the sudden perspiration from my eyes and forehead, then stared again at the red pattern on the floor.

The trail of blood ended beside the couch, all right. But did it lead *to* the couch—or *away* from it?

Thunder roared through the heat. A flicker of lightning seared the shadows of the room as I tried to puzzle it out.

What did it mean? It meant that perhaps Anita was not possessed of a demon now while she slept.

But I had slept, too.

Maybe—maybe the demon had come to *me* when *I* dozed off!

All at once, everything blurred. I was trying to remember. Where was the axe? Where could it possibly be, *now?*

Then the lightning came again and with it the final confirmation—the revelation.

I saw the axe now, crystal-clear—the axe—buried to the hilt in the top of Anita's head!

Shipmate

HE HAD looked forward for a long time to going back to the sea. The "small boat" sea—harbors and coves and bays—his own yawl, maybe thirty or thirty-five feet. For four years Neil Garrison had thought of the sunlight on the water, the gulls wheeling overhead, the sounds of rigging creaking, of oarlocks, of waves patting a hull, your hull, and now it was true—or about to be.

Garrison stood with his hands thrust deep in his coat pockets, squinting out from the pier across myriad moorings, painfully conscious that to these here he must look citified, a greenhorn.

"Boats?" had expostulated the head of the cove's ship basin. "Boats are as hard to get now as houses and rooms, and you fellows know . . ." with one look at Neil's discharge button ". . . how hard *they* are to find."

Garrison wryly admitted the truth of that.

"You mean you haven't a thing?" the young man persisted, disappointment creeping into his voice. "I'll pay anything. Anything at all reasonable, that is."

The man he addressed screwed up his eyes, shaded his hand across the sun and looked out over the bay.

"Well, now," he said, "your putting it that way and me wanting to help you. There is one boat. Understand this isn't a recommendation, but you being so anxious—there is one boat, the *Robin*. Thirty-two-foot yawl. Little two-cylinder auxiliary."

"Where is she?" Neil asked eagerly.

The man was quiet for a moment, then

Fate may be cheated in life; never in death

he found her, pointed. Garrison looked. Even at this distance she had clean lines. didn't look too badly kept up. He thought to himself, Not bad.

"How much?"

The man thought for a minute. "Let's call it a thousand even."

Neil thought, Oh-oh, to himself. She must be shot through with dry rot. Something's awfully wrong.

Heading by
A. R. TILBURNE

He said, "Can I get out to see her?"

The ship basin head took him to the company launch and they chugged out. Garrison clambered aboard eagerly. She was a neat little piece of boat all right. The hull looked sound. There was no unusual water in the bilges. Why, with a little sandpapering here and there and fresh coats of paint, she'd look mighty sassy. He came on deck from his inspection of the two-bunk cabin. It was then he noticed that the boat basin man had not followed him aboard but was still sitting in the launch. He went back aboard the service craft and sat down in the prow facing the operator. They shoved off and Garrison said, "What's wrong with her?"

The man shook his head, feigned misunderstanding.

"I'm not green at this game. The *Robin* is a good boat. Needs a little work, but she's a good boat. Yawls like her are selling for three thousand and more."

The man said something lamely about wanting to help him, Garrison being a veteran and all. Neil shook his head scornfully. He didn't like the fellow but boats were scarce. Better play along. He prodded his companion tactfully.

"Well, I'll tell you," the other said finally as they neared the pier, "you know how shipboard people are. Mighty superstitious an' all that. The *Robin's* got kind of a bad reputation and everybody goes blabbing. She's a little cantankerous. Seems to have a will of her own."

"Is that all! I like a ship with spirit, like a horse."

"Do you like her?" pushed the broker.

"Sure I do," said Garrison. "I'm going to buy her. Know anything more about her? Who was her last owner?"

WITH the deal in sight, the yacht basin man became more voluble. "She's a darn one for drifting, I'll tell you that much. Always jumping her moorings. No, don't know nothin' about her owner. She's never been claimed. Funny, the way we got her. She just cruised in here one day and one of the boys picked her up in this launch. Of course we advertised and notified the Coast Guard." The man shook his head. It didn't do to tell a prospective thousand dollars of cash that her owner had been discovered dead, dead from drowning a long way from here.

Ashore Garrison wrote out a check for the amount and the Certificate of Award was filled out for the Coast Guard.

"I'll be around in a day or two," he told the broker.

"Sure, any time," said the man, obviously pleased with the deal. "Tell you what. Just feel free to use one of our dinghys here to take out with you and use when you go sailing."

Garrison nodded. "I'm planning to live on her," he said. "Just going to get my gear together and come out."

The broker turned away and Garrison started towards his car. On the way he passed the machine shop where motors stood on racks and horses being overhauled. He'd noticed the place before and the grimy mechanic who overlorded it. This worthy was standing at the door of the shop as Neil passed, a hunched-up, wizened, sea-beaten old man with skin like worn leather and slitted eyes.

"Stranger," croaked the old man. "I hear you're fixin' to buy the *Robin.*"

"Yup," said Garrison, "I have. She's mine."

The old man looked around quickly and then beckoned Garrison closer.

"Don't take that boat, young fella."

For the second time in less than a few minutes someone had made disparaging remarks about the *Robin,* his *Robin.* Neil didn't like it. He frowned. "What's wrong?"

"She's a bad one," the mechanic hissed. "She's an evil boat, lad, and all who goes aboard her gets the evil too."

TWO days later Neil Garrison was back, his little coupe loaded with supplies and necessaries. The broker nodded to him curtly, a typical case of interest goeth after a deal. Nowhere in sight was the sea-beaten mechanic. Neil rowed one of the company's dinghys out thoughtfully. He unloaded his gear and tied the flatbottom to the mooring, then clambered aboard the *Robin.* On closer inspection his first impression of the boat was confirmed. She was a bit of all right. He planned to sandpaper and re-

paint the cabin, but otherwise, she needed nothing this season.

Below he took inventory of what her former owner had left. A boat hook, some lengths of rope, a few ancient yellowed newspapers and a couple of unreliable-looking round life preservers. Neil stowed away his own stuff and then made a check of the motor. It was a bit rusty but looked in workable condition. He started it up and after a few tries it roared to life. A sailing man at heart, Garrison was a bit contemptuous of power. However, it was useful to have a well-working plant if you needed it. He turned it off and checked the sails and rigging. Okay too. All in all, the whole deal was too good to be true. Anybody could tell you could turn around and sell this thirty-two-footer for at least three times what he'd paid for it.

Then the new skipper of the *Robin* thought of the things he'd been told about his boat. That was the sea for you, he knew from way back. People connected with it even in only a half-hearted Sunday driver way could dream up more wild tales and superstitions per keel inch than any other folks in the world. All he knew was the *Robin* was sound, and he knew ships. He'd been raised around them and on them.

He'd brought aboard a small kerosene stove and cooked himself supper. He'd worked late and most of the light was out of the sky when he finished eating. The water was dead now the way it so often is just before nightfall. He sat on deck for a while and watched other people come in, moor their craft, sailing or power, and row into the wharf to call quits to a day of boating. He was pleased with himself. He'd always thought a boat was a place to live, not just to visit.

Gradually gathering darkness caused the land to fade away into an indistinct blur. Lights sprang up here and there, occasional running reds and blues marked the passage of some late boat or evening cruise. Night settled itself slowly and softly around Neil Garrison and the boat, *Robin*. He puffed through a pipeful more of tobacco then knocked the last glowing coals overside and went below.

He decided to bunk down on the port side berth. It was cozy with his electric lantern hung from the wall bracket he'd fixed at the bunk's head. Outside was the almost inaudible soothing lap of tiny wavelets against his good hull. Garrison felt drowsy almost at once, doused the flash and turned in with a last look at the luminous dial of his wristwatch.

He woke up after about four hours, he figured, the tiny dial showing that it was ten past two. The sea had blown up a little bit more, and for a moment Neil thought that the increased rocking of the boat was what had awakened him. But only for a moment he thought that, for then it was sitting up in his bunk in the pitch black cabin he heard something over the lapping of the waves, louder and nearer. Breathing it was, the heavy rhythmical breathing of someone else. In here. In this cabin. With him.

WITH unsteady fingers Neil fumbled for the electric lamp he'd hung above his bunk. It seemed an interminable time before the flash snapped into being. In reality it could only have been a second or two, and yet in that time, who or whatever had been in the *Robin's* cabin was gone. Neil was out of his bunk quickly, staring around, eyes bulging but there was nothing but emptiness and no sound now but the innocent lapping of water. He went on deck, his flashlight in one hand, and shot its beam across every inch of the thirty-two-foot yawl. He swung the light in a circle around the mooring, and the thin finger of illumination was swallowed up by the empty darkness. Slowly the *Robin's* owner returned to his cabin. He bracketed the electric lamp and then sat on the side of his bunk for a few moments. It was quite obviously one of those so-real dreams. He was ashamed of himself for having reacted so violently.

Neil easily talked himself back into his berth and gradually his thoughts turned to cruising plans for the season. The rest of the night was uneventful. He worked topside on his boat all of the next day. His conviction that he had in the *Robin* at one and the same time a bargain and a very nice little ship was strengthened by every hour aboard her. Garrison had brought aboard supplies enough for a couple of days. When he wanted to eat, he went below and rustled

up some grub on the little kerosene stove.

He was tired his second night aboard and turned in early, lying gingerly on his somewhat sunburned back, his mind filled with many thoughts, mainly of his boat, but it wasn't until he was just about dropping off to sleep that he thought of the previous night's episode. The nightmare, for that it surely was, he now figured, seemed silly to him after twenty-four hours. He doused his flash and in a few moments was rocked to sleep by the gentle motion of the *Robin*.

To wake up in the pitch dark and to lie there for a moment in that state of borderline awareness was dreadfully reminiscent to Neil Garrison. He knew only that it must be very late, or very early, and then lying in the blackness in his bunk, he clenched his fists with the nervous tension that rose up inside him, and struggled with all his might to tell himself that it was wind, it was water on the hull that he heard and not that deep sonorous regular breathing again. This time, as though afraid to startle away the sound-maker, whether human or otherwise, his hand went stealthily towards the light and his finger met and thumbed the light switch.

The cabin was revealed to him. He sat bolt upright, completely awake now. It was empty. His inspection of the deck was as fruitless as it had been the night before. This time Garrison did not slip back again into his bunk. The breathing was no subtle trick of sea and wind. It was too sharp, clear and loud a thing in the night. Neil lay troubled until the morning.

He made a trip ashore the next day for some more supplies. The old mechanic at the Marine Basin caught his eye as he trudged down the wharf, arms laden. The leathery face cracked into the suggestion of a smile, not humorous as much as knowing and the head wagged sorrowfully from side to side. Neil said nothing, although the old man's actions, originally amusing to him, were now ominous. He continued on to his dinghy. Out of an untroubled blue sky a totally unexpected problem had reared up on Neil Garrison's horizon. He had thought of dry rot, a rust-corroded motor, hull and mast and rigging defects but never—this!

The days passed and the nights too, and with the nights came the mysterious presence whose being was signalled simply by the heavy rhythmical breathing that came some time in the middle of the night without warning or bidding and remained but with no evidence of its being other than the sound it made.

One thing Neil became sure of as the nights passed. This was no dream. It wasn't that simple. But also obviously there was no one. He began to wonder other thoughts, dangerous and unpleasant to contemplate. Four years is a long time, the kind of four years he'd spent. Other men had had trouble and cracked after those same four years. He wondered vaguely if he should consult someone—who was it you saw about such matters? A psychiatrist? And what would he say? He pictured it, rehearsed it. It would be a hard thing to explain to someone. It was a hard thing to explain to himself. This breathing without a breather!

He thought the thing out and argued it with himself for several more days. It was the Friday night following the thunderstorm that convinced him. He was cleaning up a light supper when the storm struck. The *Robin* rode at her moorings well and he stayed on deck watching the zigzag streaks of lightning cross the evening summer sky until a downpour of rain forced him below deck. Neil waited, enjoying the pitching of the boat, the creaking of its beams and the tattoo of heavy drops above his head. Finally the storm sounds abated and Garrison came on deck. He checked his mooring lines and found them sound and firm. With a final look around he went below again and turned in.

His mysterious mighty experience, although no less macabre and unpleasant, was at least less unexpected now. He no longer lay awake dreading that dark moment when he would wake up and no longer be alone on the *Robin*. He had rationalized this midnight occurrence. It was obviously some trick, some quirk of his overwrought nerves.

So this night when he woke up and heard, as he became fully awake, the breathing sounds, he was somehow less afraid. He lay for a while in the darkness, resisting the natural impulse to snap on the flashlight. The breathing had a character. Its heaviness was indicative of a large, big-chested

man. It was slow, rhythmical, and the sound of it seemed to move, Garrison noted curiously as he lay in his bunk, the tension rising within him, as though he who did the breathing were changing position in the small cabin or perhaps pacing from one end to the other and then back again.

Concentrating as he had been on this strange phenomenon, it was several minutes before Neil noticed something else, something of much more immediate and material properties. The motion of the boat to one sensitive to the ways of the sea was subtly different. The gentle swaying and rocking was not that of a craft secure at its moorings. There was action about the boat, its timbre against his fingers suggestive of a ship making headway.

Neil snapped on his flash then and sprang to the floor, climbing the companionway in his shorts. He looked first for familiar night landmarks he'd come to recognize—the twinkling all-night lights that flickered at the end of the Marine Basin pier, the airport beacon whose fanwise sweep you could see at fifteen-second intervals to the west of the Marine Basin lights. These were obliterated or gone, and yet as he sniffed the night air and played his flashlight around, there was no trace of fog.

He ran forward then and saw his mooring painter drifting idly in the water. He pulled it in hurriedly. Neil remembered checking and tightening those very knots after the storm. The motion of the water and his memory of tide tables told him that he must be drifting out of the bay towards the open sea. He ran below. A yawl drifting helter-skelter in the night at the mercy of wind and tide was not his idea of sport. The harbor outside was treacherous at best. At night and without power, you could smash yourself and boat to a fare-thee-well on the jagged reefs that jutted out into the bay mouth and the islands of rock that dotted the way on the sea side.

Neil cranked furiously at the auxiliary motor. There were controls topside, but the motor itself had to be started down here. As he struggled with it, he imagined he heard the sound of sea on reefs growing louder. With fear prickling his scalp, he worked harder and finally the motor sputtered to life. Garrison ran on deck again and seized the tiller. He had no time to look around. He sensed rather than saw the danger off his starboard beam. He put his weight on the tiller and turned her hard aport. He shoved the throttle control all the way forward, and only then with the deck quivering from the motor vibrations and the *Robin* at last minding her helm did Garrison turn around and look.

HE WAS dangerously close to sheer, bleak cliffs fringed by reefs that stuck up out of the sea not more than a few yards astern, like razor blades. Garrison felt horror clutch at his throat, not only at his narrow escape but at the utter desolation and sinister aspect of the scene.

He forced his eyes away then and hunched shuddering shoulders thankfully as the sea took his attention. The water had kicked up and he felt the tug of its action in his hands that gripped the tiller. It was almost as though the *Robin* had become hypnotized by her near doom, as though she wanted to turn around and head back toward that barren shore to seek the ship's death that so surely waited there.

Neil forced himself to keep eyes straight out ahead and he counted off the seconds and the minutes. Finally, reaching the smoother water of the bay, Garrison allowed himself a backward glance. He almost sighed outright with relief when he found that night had closed down, shrouding that sinister island in its dark distance. He took the *Robin* to her mooring, made the yawl secure, then he sat on deck to think. It was too late and Neil too troubled to think seriously of sleep that night. Try as he might, Garrison could not convince himself that his rope to the buoy had somehow slipped loose.

He was positive of this because he'd checked it so carefully just after the thunderstorm, and what had just happened reassured him on another point. The breathing—that was a nebulous phenomenon to consider. It had no healthy explanation—seemingly, and inevitably Neil had begun to wonder more and more until finally he had suspected himself, had suspected the integrity of his own mind, even questioned his own sanity.

This now changed all that, didn't it?

His thoughts tumbled one after another. He wondered wildly if there was any sharp scheme afoot to force him into a resale of the boat. After all, the broker at the Marine Basin here made his living from commissions on such transactions. Obviously, to build up the myth of a haunted boat and then proceed to *haunt* it by some tomfoolery could be a very profitable enterprise.

IN THE morning Garrison went ashore and found his way into the little machine shop. Above the clatter of lathes and drills turning, he made known to the old mechanic that he'd like a word with him. The oldster's name was Chris. He worked on drilling a hole for a cotter pin in a propeller shaft, acting as if he hadn't heard Garrison's request. After waiting a few minutes Neil leaned forward. He tried another tack.

"It's about the *Robin*, he murmured in the old man's ear. "I want to know about her," and he held a bill between thumb and forefinger enticingly.

Old Chris killed his lathe machine, and with the noise gone from the shop, the two men stood in the sudden shocking silence looking at each other. The old fellow finally spoke.

"And what was it you were wanting to know?"

"Who owned her?" snapped Garrison, pushing his theory of a greedy buy-and-sell broker. "How many owners did she have before me?"

The mechanic considered the question, then his mouth worked.

"Only one owner before you, Mister."

One owner! That blasted Neil's theory. "Elwood Collins, his name was. Regular harbor man."

"What'd he do? What'd he use the *Robin* for."

"Transporting." Just that single word. Uncommunicative old cuss—that could mean anything.

"What transporting?"

Laconically. "Things and people."

"Oh, sort of pleasure-sailing stuff."

"Nope."

Garrison's brow wrinkled perplexedly. "I don't get it. Where did he take these people?"

Old Chris gestured seaward. "Out to the island. Doctor Jisrow's island."

"Kind of like some sort of ferry service," Neil rushed on, still not too interested. He was trying to draw the old man out. What had been the meaning of those grimaces? Everything sounded all right to him.

"Well, that sounds harmless enough," the *Robin's* new owner exclaimed cheerfully. "Taking people out and back to an island sounds like a reasonable way of making a living."

"Some people didn't come back," said Chris.

"Didn't come back? I don't get it."

"It was kind of a one-way business," the old man went on.

The aged fellow was obviously touched. Garrison straightened to leave. At least he had another lead on the boat.

"Wonder where I'd find this fellow, Elwood Collins?"

"Elwood Collins?" said the mechanic giving him a queer look. "You'd have to be some shakes to find him, Matey. Seems he fell overboard from the *Robin* and drowned not so long ago."

The two stood in silence for several minutes. Garrison wanted to turn and walk away. He felt old Chris' eyes upon him.

"Having trouble with the ship, lad?"

Garrison mumbled something.

"She's not a happy ship," wagged the old man. "She's got ill-luck with her everywhere she goes," and the ancient leaned forward, looking first from side to side, almost as though a wraith itself might overhear him. "There's a dead man's hand at the tiller," he hissed.

Garrison stumbled out of the shop, wanting the fresh air, wanting to get away from the ominous old man and his sinister tales. Behind him he heard the shrill cackle of laughter.

He saw the broker later in the morning and cornered him on the subject.

"You must have been talking to old Chris," said the Marine Basin agent. "He's got a lot of strange ideas. Yes, it was owned by Captain Elwood Collins. He did have an accident, fell overside and drowned in a quick storm that came up before he could beat it into the bay. He used to run errands for Professor Jisrow out on North

Island. Experimental fellow. Maybe you read about him. But don't go listening to any of Chris' wild tales, mister."

BUT Garrison noticed the broker's shifty eyes avoided his own. On sudden impulse Neil decided to spend the day in town. He hied himself to the village library and got a file of old papers. Sure enough, here were references to Dr. Aaron Jisrow, famous physicist and experimentalist. The sole inhabitant of North Island, a wedge of gray, bleak rock set out in the sea beyond the mouth of the bay.

Garrison mulled over all the references. He talked with the librarian and town old codgers that he found here and there. In his mind the picture of Jisrow took form, and then there was Captain Collins with his little boat, the *Robin,* running errands between the mainland and that other world, North Island.

Much that he read and that was said to him was intriguing and sinister, but the implications were even deeper, were even more macabre. Garrison hurried back to his boat but not before stopping at the village hardware store and picking up several yards of heavy chain and a padlock. When he got back to the Marine Basin, the pier was nearly deserted. It was a gray day and most of the sailing parties had returned, beating the storm that seemed imminent coming out of the east.

As Garrison walked down the gangway to the dinghy float, he saw a familiar figure standing on the dock. It was old Chris. The mechanic spied him as he drew near, laden with the chain and some provisions. The ancient eyed him in an inquisitive, almost insolent way, and Neil was angry at it as he loaded his boat.

"See you got a length of chain there," the old man finally observed.

Garrison did not reply.

"Usually ghosts supply their own," Chris cackled immoderately at his own joke.

Garrison pulled his dinghy into the water, sat her and put out his oars. He noticed the broker looking down disapprovingly at them from the pier head. The Marine Basin agent hailed old Chris irritably and the old man saluted mockingly and headed up the gangway.

Neil bent to his oars and headed toward his ship. It was his home now and he meant to fight for it. He was angered at that last remark of Chris' about "ghosts supplying their own chains." He was annoyed and irritated as he climbed aboard the *Robin* and he started immediately with his preparations for outwitting whomever or whatever was badgering him and the good ship *Robin.*

Neil fussed around securing his rigging and with other odd jobs above and below deck until the light drew out of the sky. It was a good oarsman's ten-minute row to the shore, but he still thought he could make out Chris' figure on the pier. For some reason, the exact point of which was obscure to him, Garrison decided it would be just as well to hide his mooring precautions as best he could. Finally, when gathering dusk had placed a wall between him and the shipyard, he went to work with his flashlight and the chain, looping one end through the top of the anchorage buoy and then securing it around a stout stanchion on his own deck. Neil then fastened together the ends of the chain with the heavy padlock he'd bought for that purpose.

He went below deck and tried to pass the hours by reading, but his eyes would wander from the page. There was very slight motion tonight on the water and even the eternal lapping of wavelets against the hull around him was but a small muted noise.

FINALLY, despite his tension and anticipation, fatigue overcame him. He forced himself topside to examine the chain once again, then satisfied that it was as he'd left it previously, Neil came below again and tumbled into his bunk.

It could not have been many minutes later that he fell asleep. His dreams were full of wind and sailing, canvases full, the *Robin* standing almost on beam's end. It was a sailor's dream even down to the noise of the rigging, the squeal and whine of stays and stanchions, or could it more nearly be described as a *clattering* . . . or a *clanking?* And so Garrison became suddenly awake, the dream fading in his mind, but the sounds . . . the sounds were very real. They were small and cautious, but unmistakable, as though the two strands of his chain to

the mooring buoy were being gently rubbed together. There was a louder clank and then silence.

Neil unhooked his flashlight from its place at his head and swung to his feet, pattering toward the companionway on silent, bare soles. Just then the silence was broken by the sound of a soft tapping thud at the boat's side as though some denizen of the deep had reached out a long forefinger and poked the *Robin's* hull with it. Neil came on deck inch by inch, came to eye-level and peered. At first, he saw nothing, and then as his pupils dilated with concentration to compensate for the blackness, he saw startlingly close the shadow of something or someone. Why, it was so close that he could almost—he did!

Garrison sprung forward at the shape so near. Although such physical action implied a belief in a physical opponent, it was with considerable relief that the *Robin's* owner felt solidity and substance underneath his encircling arms. The force of his attack carried his wholly surprised and now sputtering opponent to the deck. Garrison sat on the man's chest—for so he proved to be by the baritone curses—and brought the flashlight up against the face.

It was Neil's turn to be surprised, for the face that blinked back at him in the ray of light was none other than that of old Chris, the eccentric mechanic. Garrison rose to his feet, pulling the other man erect.

"What're you up to, sneaking aboard me in the middle of the night?" He still had a tight grasp on the ancient's coat.

CHRIS shook his head but said nothing. Neil walked the other man forward on a tour of inspection. Sure enough, forward where the chain to the mooring was connected lay a metal cutter's saw, and against the starboard side of the *Robin* the rowboat the mechanic had used nuzzled against the hull. Silently, Garrison led his captive down into the cabin. He sat him down, put the flashlight between them on the table.

"So you're the fellow who's been tampering with my moorings. Guess this isn t the first time you've boarded the *Robin* since I've taken her over."

"S'help me, guvner," said the old man, "this's the first time I've been aboard since ya took this ship, and I didn't wanna come tonight!" Chris cast an uneasy glance over his shoulder up the companionway that led into the darkness.

"I suppose you know I can have you arrested for this," Garrison said.

"Now, mister," the old man's face was pleading, almost pathetic, "you don't wanna do that. I only tried to do ma duty. What I had to."

"Is it your duty to board ships in the dead of night and cut them loose from their anchorage? I had some trouble in that storm the other night. Found myself drifting out toward North Island. Could have lost the *Robin* and my own life. What about that?"

Chris paled perceptibly. "Hones', I didn't do that. It was *him* that did it!" He whispered the last as though afraid of being overheard.

"Him?" said Neil. "What do you mean, him?"

"The old skipper of this ship. He's bound to take her over again, I tell ya. You should never have bought her, mister. Leave her to him, I says!" The old man's eyes dilated with fear, and Garrison realized with shocking suddenness that he was dealing with a person who was not sane.

"You still haven't told me why you sneaked aboard this boat," Garrison insisted firmly, but the mechanic merely mumbled in reply over and over, "Leave it to him, I says. Leave it to him. It's the devil's ship now!"

Garrison stood up abruptly. "I'm taking you ashore," he stated. "We'll see what the sheriff has to say to this!"

That seemed to shock Chris back into the sphere of reality. He almost went down on his knees before the *Robin's* skipper.

"Please, mister! I'm only doin' like he's whispered to me. Wouldn'ta had to but you put that steel chain on your mooring. It's easier for me ta get a metal saw, working like I do in a machine shop than for him. I just do what he whispers to me."

"Who!" fairly yelled Garrison.

"Skipper Collins," replied the old man in a faint voice.

"But he's dead!"

"He's dead and he isn't," wagged the old fellow. "You know, son, in this world

there's some things dead that shouldn't be; and there's some things alive that should be dead!" He laughed that high-pitched cackling laugh of his; the laughter of a man who has seen things not of this world, and who, himself, is no longer entirely of this world.

"You don't wanna make trouble for me, son," said Chris. "I'm tryin' to be friend to you when I tell you to leave this accursed ship. I'll stay away, sure, but sooner or later, he'll come ta you. Not only you'll hear him but you'll see him! He means ta get this ship to sail where he's got ta!"

The two men stood facing each other now, Garrison undecided. After all, he didn't want to cause the old crackpot any undue trouble.

"How come you're in on this?" he queried. "How do you know so much about Skipper Collins? Elwood Collins, wasn't it?"

Chris chuckled. "Why, mister, didn't ya know? I'm Collins. Skipper of your boat here was my son. Isn't it kinda natural that' he comes to his old father ta get things done more easily when he's on the Other Side?" The old man waved a fist into the darkness eloquently.

Garrison let him go then. He could not find it in his heart to take Chris ashore and make trouble for him with the sheriff. The oldster was obviously touched. Neil shooed him onto the deck and overboard into his rowboat. Rather than being grateful, the old man, as soon as he stroked away from the *Robin's* side, sounded a warning note:

"If I know 'im, he'll be back, mister. You'll wish you'd never set foot on that craft!"

GARRISON watched, and when the rowboat was swallowed up in the darkness he listened to the creak of oarlocks growing fainter until finally inaudible. He waited a short time more on deck and then went below.

Sleep was the farthest thing from his mind. He checked his mooring lines and everything was shipshape, but a sense of chill anticipation was within him. Whatever Fate had in store for him this night, he meant to meet it awake and on his two feet. To save his torch batteries, he lit a thick storm candle and set it on the platform fixture by his bunk, at the same time turning off the flashlight.

Below deck here, the motion of the *Robin* became more perceptible. There was the sighing of wind suddenly springing up out of the night in the stanchions and rigging. There'd been reports earlier that a bit of a blow was expected. The increasing rollers rocked the ship, and try as he would, Garrison found the desire to close his eyes for just a second or a minute almost irresistible. He was being lulled to sleep, he knew, and yet his senses fought against the overpowering drowsiness.

He tried walking briskly around the cramped cabin but he always ended up sitting on the edge of his bunk, and after a little time passed, his head would nod again. The hour was late. After one, his watch told him, and he'd had none too much sleep recently anyway. Finally he gave in to the heavy fingers that plucked down his eyelids and soothed his still anxious mind. The dim interior of the cabin faded from his conscious eye and he saw instead one of those strange fantasies that come in troubled sleep.

The images were somewhat kaleidoscopic. First he would be aboard his ship, sitting in the cramped, dim-lit cabin, and opposite him there would be a shadowy figure. Then forward where the companionway should be leading to the deck, there stretched out endless distances of maze, and it was as though his mind followed these. A depression settled over his soul even in sleep, for were these not the long, dim corridors of Time that led irrevocably to that last shrouded door we deny until it opens some day before each one of us?

Garrison must have tossed and turned fitfully, or perhaps the increased rocking of the boat did it. He woke up shockingly sprawled on the mahogany floorboards. The shock of the fall brought him his full senses. As he tried to get to his feet in the dimly lit cabin, he noticed that the night candle was out—and yet he could see it. His wide, staring eyes traced the eerie luminosity.

THERE in the corner (his fingers bit deeply into the palms of his hands) a figure huddled in a worn blue peajacket, the

face averted, sitting there motionless—just breathing in and out, heavily, rhythmically. Neil tried to scream then and he was sure no sound came forth. He crouched against his bunk, his back bumping against the soft mattress as the *Robin* rolled, his mind numb with an unspeakable, nameless dread. For the figure with all its immobility, for all that it was faceless, had an *outre* boundless terror about it that chilled and stiffened his fingers and hands and legs and brain.

This brooding menace became a wholly positive thing, though when two or three or maybe four wallowing rolls of the *Robin* later, the figure in the corner very slowly, very methodically, rose and stood at full length, a broad, heavy man, the face still downcast under the soiled white skipper's cap. The spectral figure strode forward then purposefully, but if there were the sounds of walking and of the heightening of sea, Neil heard them not, only that breathing coming closer and heavier.

For a moment Garrison recoiled and then instinctively he stepped between the intruder and the companionway door, his fist closed around his sheath knife, and he drew the blade free. He ordered the seafarer to stop, but the man came on, lumberingly, relentlessly. As he drew closer, the sound of the breathing and the figure's luminosity confused Garrison. He felt his wrist seized with an overpowering strength. He wrenched with his knife and thought he reached an arm but then knew he must have been mistaken. His opponent's strength was not of this world. He was flung sideways like a rag doll, landing sickeningly on all fours. The figure disappeared up the companionway, drawing with it the luminance, leaving the cabin in darkness.

Then graciously, the reassuring thought came to Garrison that this was one of those most realistic nightmares, a continuation of his earlier dream. He fell upon the bunk, and ever-widening black spots blotted out the images where the form of Garrison's nightmare changed or blessed unconsciousness swept over him.

It was an immeasurable time later that he again became aware of himself and the cabin. This time again he was not alone. The luminous figure was sitting huddled in the corner. But this time above the breathing there was a voice, heavy and rumbling like the thunder of doom on far-away cliffs. The story the voice told was a strange one. It came to Garrison in his fitful state by words and images. The teller—of course—was his mysterious companion, Skipper Elwood Collins, long-dead but recalled now for a final duty.

Collins had been the lifeline between Professor Aaron Jisrow on bleak North Island and the shore. Jisrow, wound up in his ambitious experiments, needed someone he could count on to ply between his desolate island laboratory and the shore. Collins was that man, for many months and years. There were extra jobs, the voice and the story went on. After a while there was a need for live things for the experiments, cats, dogs, chickens. Jisrow explained to Collins that he was on the verge of a great discovery, the secret of the reclamation of life, as well as its denial. Collins, of no great scientific turn of mind, nevertheless had enough common sense to realize from what he saw around him on the mysterious island that the professor had stumbled on something which could bring a clever man (like Collins) a tidy sum of money, for had not Collins seen Jisrow transform a lifeless cat or dog into a living creature of immeasurable propensities?

SO THE day came that Collins began to think for himself. He was always pestering Jisrow to try his "treatments" on real human beings. The unscrupulous skipper learned the rudimentary principles of operating Jisrow's machines. He would learn all he could and then at the proper time Aaron Jisrow would have an "accident" and he, Collins, would own the machines that could make life out of death.

In his eagerness to get along with the experiments, Collins brought a young boy and girl to the island. Jisrow was angry but allowed himself to be persuaded to use them as human guinea pigs. The youngsters were enchanted but wholly skeptical. Jisrow set his controls, explaining that to take no chances, he would merely experiment with low voltage. After the professor had gone to the control chamber, Collins had quickly turned the mechanism to maxi-

mum. The young people, still laughing and joking in the experimental room, died horribly before Jisrow ascertained Collins' treachery.

Their physical, nervous and psychical selves were so completely destroyed by the voltage cortexes that all attempts to resuscitate the two victims failed. Jisrow in a frenzy had accused Collins. The seafarer, surly, had turned on the old man, beaten him and left him for dead. As he was making his way aboard the *Robin* at the cliffs' foot, the old professor had appeared above him and cursed him for his infidelity. He would die some day, the professor swore, not just body but his soul and his whole being, in the precise way he had slaughtered the two youngsters. Collins had sailed off, smug in the knowledge that Jisrow, for his own protection, would conceal the bodies. After all, no one had seen them transported to the island.

Months passed, and occasionally rumors came from North Island. Jisrow, it seemed, had gone quite mad and lived exclusively off wild berries and vegetation on his island. Not many months afterward the *Robin* was caught in a sudden squall. She'd turned over, and Elwood Collins had been drowned, his body recovered weeks later. It was some satisfaction to his old father that Elwood, who for all his knowledge of the ways of the water, had feared the sea, had not died hard. He was laid to rest with few mourners come to mark the passing of the sullen, taciturn skipper.

But then the trouble had only begun. Jisrow still claimed him, even in the grave. To fulfill his destiny which had been cheated in life, Skipper Elwood Collins must come back even in death and return to North Island. . . .

Garrison sat bolt upright, hitting his head hard on the cross-beam above his bunk. The pitching and creaking of the beams was preposterous. He leaped to his feet, shaking the last cobwebs of sleep from him. The *Robin* was off her mooring again, surely. He raced on deck and found the boat heeled well over under full sail, making into the teeth of a gale. Water came over the bow and drenched him. He turned then and looked sternwards towards where the tiller was, deathly afraid and yet knowing what he would see—the inexorable figure of Skipper Collins, soiled visored hat down over his eyes, the blue peajacket and the dungarees.

The *Robin* was riding he knew not where. All familiar landmarks were out of sight, seemingly somewhere thousands of miles away beyond the storm and the darkness. And then out of the gloom dead ahead over the screaming of the sea and the wind and the crying canvas, Garrison heard a sound like a voice calling in words and a language not of this world. The spectral figure at the tiller stiffened, stood erect. The wind caught the full expanse of canvas and drove the ship faster, standing almost on her beam ends.

GARRISON screamed again and again but his voice was thrust back in his throat by the wind. He turned forward holding a stanchion to keep from being swept away. There was something looming up out of the dimness, a greater blackness. Then his own earlier experience came flooding back on him as the sinister shadow grew as though to engulf them. Ahead there were the bleak knifelike rocks and cliffs of North Island with a dead man driving the *Robin* to her doom.

Garrison gained the tiller laboriously and screamed at the again hunched figure still with its face downcast. He tore at the man's arms; they were as steel, but for the first time the face rolled upward to look into his own, and at the sight, Neil lost all sanity. The eyes were dead pieces of glass with the skin a purple molding whiteness, the lips shrunken over decaying, snaggled teeth. Over his shoulder and through the night, Garrison saw and felt North Island hovering back there, reaching out as though with sinuous black arms to envelop them.

He reached lower then for the belaying pin he kept to lock the tiller on a set course. The pin came in his hands and he struck with all his force squarely at the evil, impossible face before him. The cheek bones splintered and the pin went in, *actually into the rotting globe of a head.* It stuck there with pieces of fractured yellow-white bone like teeth around it. But still the hand on the tiller was firm, the form unmoving, driving the ship relentlessly forward.

Garrison ran away screaming, then. Better death in the sea than this prolonged horror with dead things that will not die. He flung himself into the turbulent water, and as the *Robin* flashed by he caught a last glimpse of Skipper Collins, his bashed-in face still dissected squarely by the belaying pin imbedded in it. In a moment, the ship had passed and was beyond sight in the storm.

Garrison tried to quiet his pounding heart and conserve his strength. He swam strongly, trying to concentrate on the strokes that were necessary for survival. Later, he thought he heard the unmistakable crashing of a ship going on the rocks and the high-pitched voice from the cliffs above seemed to rise and become a part of the howling wind if it had not been that from the beginning.

Garrison swam. And swam. And when the gray light of dawn lifted the mantle of gloom from the eastern sky, he saw ahead of him the point of the harbor and splashed and staggered his way up on the beach to collapse there more dead than alive.

A fisherman found him, and a week in bed resuscitated his physical exhaustion. But there was now a gnawing unquenchable obsession that knifed at his mind and heart that forced Neil Garrison to go to Chris Collins at the boat yard and make inquiries as subtly as possible. The old father was inclined to be lenient with Garrison since his "unfortunate experience in the storm" and his ship hammering itself to death against the North Island rocks. No, he revealed, his son had died easily the way drowning people do. "Why, there weren't even a mark on the boy," as though that fact was a great redeeming factor.

Garrison went away with heavier hands of dread about his heart, and one night for the sake of his sanity, he found himself in the small town graveyard. It was a desolate out-of-the-way place and he did what he had to do with pick and shovel without fear of intrusion. It was a distasteful thing, an abhorrent thing, but it was not as impossible as going through a lifetime without knowing.

He forced open the cheap casket and feared for a moment to shine his hooded flashlight, but then determination took hold of his fingers and he flicked the beam on. It was almost as if an acquaintance lay here, the soiled dungarees and the peajacket, and there imbedded in the garishly white decaying face was the belaying pin. Garrison lowered the casket top with a sigh and a prayer. He undid his vandalism and walked off, at last a free man to go towards another and free ship which would know no debt to fate or the Beyond.

Heard on the Roof at Midnight

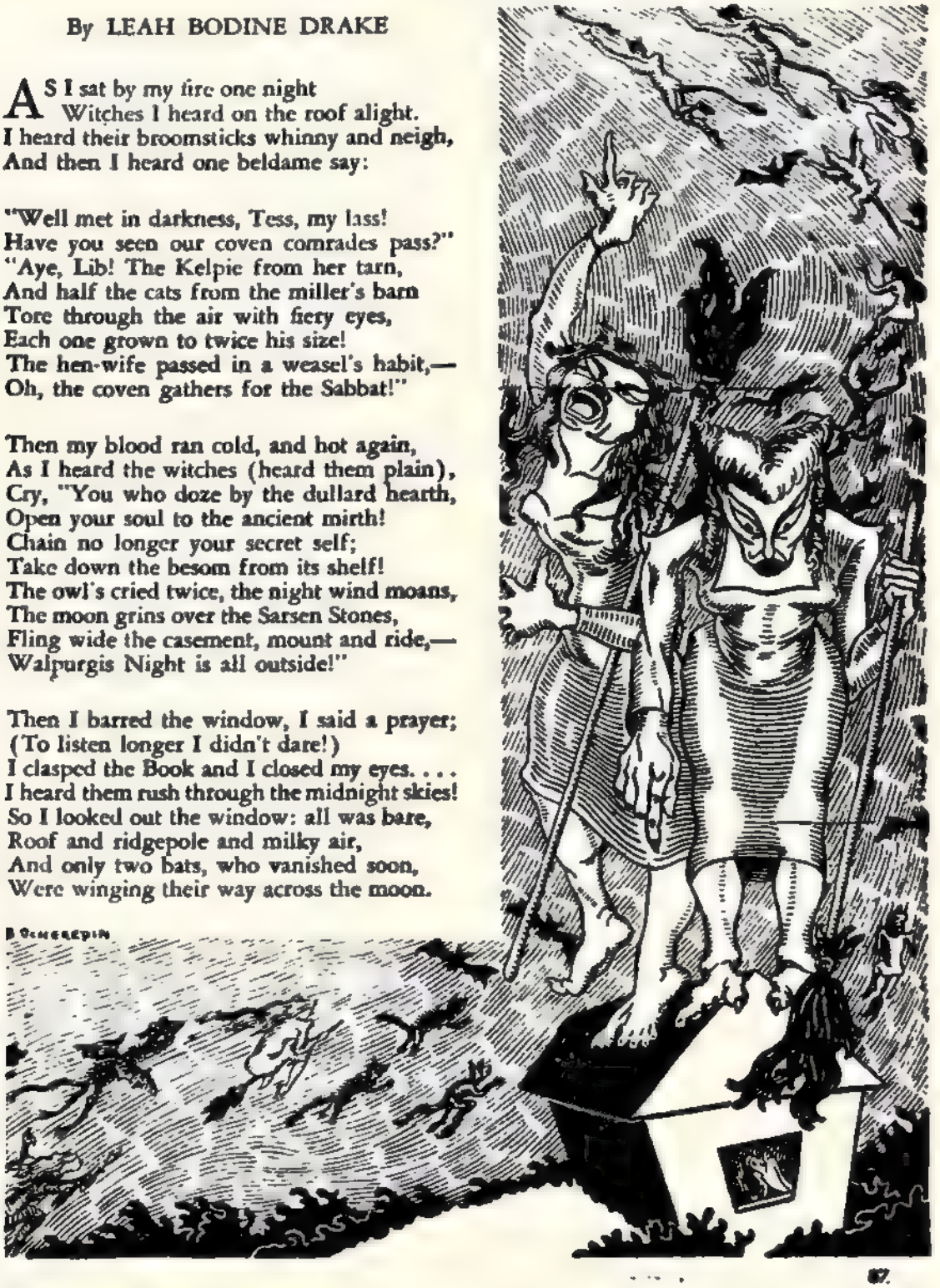
By LEAH BODINE DRAKE

AS I sat by my fire one night
Witches I heard on the roof alight.
I heard their broomsticks whinny and neigh,
And then I heard one beldame say:

"Well met in darkness, Tess, my lass!
Have you seen our coven comrades pass?"
"Aye, Lib! The Kelpie from her tarn,
And half the cats from the miller's barn
Tore through the air with fiery eyes,
Each one grown to twice his size!
The hen-wife passed in a weasel's habit,—
Oh, the coven gathers for the Sabbat!"

Then my blood ran cold, and hot again,
As I heard the witches (heard them plain),
Cry, "You who doze by the dullard hearth,
Open your soul to the ancient mirth!
Chain no longer your secret self;
Take down the besom from its shelf!
The owl's cried twice, the night wind moans,
The moon grins over the Sarsen Stones,
Fling wide the casement, mount and ride,—
Walpurgis Night is all outside!"

Then I barred the window, I said a prayer;
(To listen longer I didn't dare!)
I clasped the Book and I closed my eyes. . . .
I heard them rush through the midnight skies!
So I looked out the window: all was bare,
Roof and ridgepole and milky air,
And only two bats, who vanished soon,
Were winging their way across the moon.



Frogfather

BY MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Strange beings dwell in that part of the swamp that is deepest and darkest

NO, I never liked frogs' legs very much, not even before what happened. And I wouldn't eat them now if I was starving. This is why.

Though I'd known and worked for Ranson Cuff for two years, all of each day and part of most nights, I remember him clearly only in the dark of that particular night we went frog-hunting. Ranson Cuff was the sort of man who shoved himself into your

Heading by A. R. TILBURNE

mind, like a snake crawling into a gopher hole. I defy anyone to find anyone else who liked Ranson Cuff—maybe his wife liked him, but she didn't live with him for more than three weeks. Nobody around the Swamps liked him, though he was the best off in money. He ran a string of hunting camps for strangers from up North, who came to hunt deer or fish for bass, once in a while to chase bear with dogs. He did his end of that job well, and if he was rude the strangers figured him for a picturesque character. I've heard them call him that. The Swamps people called him other things, to his face if he didn't have mortgages on their houseboats, cabins and trapping outfits.

This night we were paddling, he and I and an old, old Indian whose name I never knew, in a really beautiful boat he'd taken for a bad debt. Cuff was going to get a mess of frogs' legs, which he loved, and which he'd love three times as much because he'd killed the frogs for them. Cuff would have killed people if he'd dared, just for fun. I know he would. I'd gone to work for him when I was fifteen—my old maid aunt, who raised me, owed him money she could never pay. When he told her to, she gave me to him, and I suppose what I earned went into settling the debt. Slavery—and he was the quickest and oftenest to remind me of it.

That night was clear and dark, not a speck of moon and all the stars anyone ever saw at once. They sheened the swamp-water, up to where the great fat clumps of trees cuddled it in at the edges. I paddled, the old Indian paddled, and Cuff sat like a fat toad—not a frog—in the bow with his lantern and his gig. The lantern-light gave his face the kind of shadows that showed us what he was. His face was as round as a lemon, and as yellow and as sour. His mouth was small, and his eyes couldn't have been closer together without mixing into each other, and his little nose was the only bony thing about him.

"Head for that neck of water northeast," he said. "I haven't ever been in there, but I hear frogs singing. And none of them are out along these banks."

HE CURSED the frogs for not being there to kill. I began to scoop with my paddle to turn the boat the way he said, but the old Indian pulled his paddle out with a little dripping slop.

"We don't go there," said the old Indian. He spoke wonderful English, better than Cuff or myself.

"Don't go where?" snarled Cuff. He always snarled, at people who had to take it. The old Indian had come to work for him, hungry and ragged, and wasn't exactly fat or well-dressed now.

"I'm speaking for your good, Mr. Cuff," said the old Indian. "That's no place to stick frogs."

"I can hear them singing!" Cuff said. "Listen, there must be a whole nation of them."

"They're there because they're safe," said the old Indian.

"Khaa!" Cuff spit into the water. "Safe! That's what they think. We're going in there to stick a double mess."

"I'm of the first people here, and I can tell you the truth of it, Mr. Cuff," went on the old Indian, with Indian quiet and Indian stubbornness. "I'm surprised you don't know about that neck of water and what's beyond. It's the home of Khongabassi."

"Don't know him," growled Cuff.

"Khongabassi," repeated the old Indian. "The Frogfather. He's lived there since the world was made. The oldest ones say he dug the waterways and planted the trees along them. And the frogs are his children."

"Oh, heaven deliver me!" Cuff screwed his fat face into the sourest frown I had ever seen, even on him. "Indian talk I came out to hear. You make me sick. Get going northwest."

"No," and the old Indian laid his paddle inside the boat.

"You're fired, you old—" and Cuff cursed the Indian every way he knew. He knew a great many ways, including the Indian's ancestry back to Adam and his children down to the last generation. "You're fired," he said again. "Get out of this boat."

"Yes, Mr. Cuff," said the old Indian gently. "Put in to the shore—"

"Get out right here," blustered Cuff, "I'm not taking you to the shore."

"Yes," said the old Indian again, and slipped overboard sidewise, like a muskrat. He barely rippled the water as he swam

away. Cuff spit after him, and cocked his head.

"Hark at those frogs singing!" he said. "Frogfather—I'll frogfather them! Right in their pappy's dooryard. Johnny," he said to me, "get us going there."

I did all the paddling, and we came to the neck of water. Trees were close on both sides, shutting out the little, little gleam of starlight, but there seemed to be a sort of green brightness beyond. Cuff swore at me to make me ship my paddle.

"Look at the glow from under the surface," said Cuff. He reached right down into his half-knowledge for a cozy explanation. "Must be full of those little shiny bugs like the ones in the sea. Makes it easy for us to find the frogs."

I remembered how my grandfather had once said you're better off knowing a few things than to know so many things that aren't so. My hunch was that maybe there was rotten wood somewhere around, what old-timers call foxfire. Cuff, at the bow, knelt with his lantern in one hand and his gig in the other. The gig had a hand-forged fork for its head, three sharp barbed spikes. The shaft was a piece of hickory, about four feet long and as thick as your hand could hold comfortably.

"Snake us along the bank, Johnny," he said. "Now hold her. I see one."

I SAW it too, in the light of his lantern, a nice fat green frog on a rock set in some roots. It squatted with its knees high and its hands together in front of it, like a boy waiting his turn at a marble game. Its head was lifted, its eyes fixed by the dazzling glare of the lantern, and those eyes were like precious jewels. Cuff stabbed down, and brought it up, squirming and kicking, its mouth gaped open, all three tines of his gig in it. He smacked it on the inside of the boat to quiet it, and shoved it off at my feet.

"Got your knife?" he growled. "Then slice off its legs—no, snake me along again, I see a bigger one yonder."

"You're tipping me away," he said. "Balance me back, or I'll put a knot on your head with this gig-handle."

"It's not me, Mr. Cuff," I argued, but not with any heart it in, because he always frightened me. "You must be tipping us—"

"My weight's here next the frog, you fool," he said. "And you're tipping us toward the water. You'll have us over in a minute!"

The boat was tipping, and I shifted to bring her back on an even keel, but she tipped more, and I looked around to see what snag might have hooked us.

Over the thwart lay something like a long, smooth piece of wood, darkish and dampish in the dim light. Yes, a snag, I thought. But Cuff turned and lifted the lantern, and I saw it was no snag.

It was a long green arm!

From elbow to fingertip it was visible above the thwart, weighting down that side of the boat and tipping us in the direction of the open water. The ordinary human arm is eighteen inches long, I hear, the length of the old-fashioned Bible cubit. This was longer than that. Two feet at least, and probably more. It was muscled smoothly and trimly from the neat point of the elbow to the slender, supple wrist, and beyond this stretched slim, pointed fingers, but not enough. The hand spread, and it had three fingers and a thumb, with no gap where the other finger had been lost. Between them was a shiny wet web, and it was dead gray, where the arm was covered with sleek green skin blotched twice or three times with brown-black spots as big as saucers.

What Cuff said I wouldn't want written down as my own last words. He said it loudly, and at the noise another arm came

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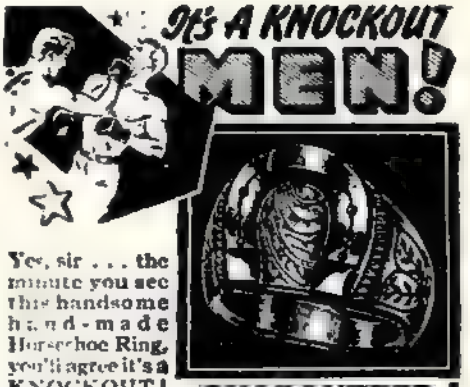
up across the other, and hooked there. Then a head came into view and looked at us.

THE lantern-light caught the eyes first, great popped-out eyes of every jewel-flashing color known to the vainest woman that lives. They looked at Cuff. They were set in a heavy blunt head the size of a fish-basket, and in some ways the head was like Cuff's. But it had no bony nose, no nose at all, and the mouth was a long curved slit like a tight-closed Gladstone bag. Under the mouth, where the chin ought to be, the white throat dipped in and out, in and out, breathing calmly.

The creature lifted a hand, quicker than Cuff could stab. It took hold of the gig just below the head. That hickory was as strong as a hoe-handle, but the big green webbed hand snapped off the iron fork just like picking a daisy, and tossed it away with a splash. At that splash every frog stopped singing. And the big elbows heaved a little, shoulders came into view, and I saw what there was to see of the creature, down to where its waist came out of the water.

All blotchy green and brown, with a white belly and a wet smoothness, it was a frog. But it was bigger than a man by twice, I suppose. Our boat went over, and I flew through the air and splashed in. That moment in the air was enough to see Cuff caught by neck and shoulder in those two green hands. And he went down under water, lantern and all. He hadn't time for another curse.

As I sank, I got my arms and legs working. I was more anxious to swim away than swim up. My eyes were open, and I saw under the water by the green light that was there. That part of the Swamps must have been the deepest, and many times my length below I could make out old drowned tree-trunks, a lost forest from some ancient time of storm and washaway. They were mixed up together as if something had tried to make a hut or nest of them, and I suppose something had. There was a hole among them like a door, with the green light coming from it, and down toward that hole swam a long green shape, nine feet at least from its blunt head to the heels of its flipping webbed feet. Under one arm it carried



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Cuff, tucked like a stolen baby, and the other hand helped swim it along.

Then I broke surface and churned away, sick and faint and ready to burst with my pounding heart, but making for the little channel by which we had come into the place.

I MADE it, and when I swam out, I heard a long, soft whistle. It made me almost jump out of the water. Another whistle, and something dark and swift and silent came toward me. I tried to turn away, but my strength was gone. The dark shape bore close, and it was a canoe. The old Indian put down his hand and helped me get in. Then I lay there and came to life, while he paddled the canoe idly around and around, here and there, on the peaceful starlit water.

He did not seem surprised or even curious. He asked me nothing. When I was able, I told him what had happened.

"It was Khongabassi," he said quietly when I had finished. "Khongabassi, the Frogfather. When a stranger comes to kill children in their very home, will not their father help them?"

That was something new to think about. I got strength to sit up.

"We'll have to get help," I said, "and go back and—"

"And challenge Khongabassi?" he finished for me. "Why? He saved his children. He took only Mr. Cuff and let you go. Khongabassi never takes any more prey than he needs. But if many men go there, with grappling hooks and weapons—then Khongabassi will have a way to deal with them, and I do not want to see it."

I didn't want to see it, either. I asked a question. "You knew all about Khongabassi, didn't you? You knew what he would do?"

I saw the old Indian's head nod against the stars. "Of course. He has done that to others who came to his home without permission. We first people learned many lives ago to keep to our ways and leave him to his. Khongabassi is not terrible, he is only Khongabassi. You think of him as what we call a *djibaw*, an evil spirit. We think of him as a part of nature, that defends nature's weak things. Men should be a part

of nature, too, and perhaps they would escape what Mr. Cuff has not escaped."

"What shall we do, though?" I persisted.

"Oh," said the old Indian, "we shall think of a story, you and I, that explains Mr. Cuff's death. A story that white men will believe."

THE EYRIE

WEIRD TALES at Bikini

WE CAME across an interesting International News Service report a while back. It told of the doing of the atom-bomb plane crew just before they came in on their target.

It seems that the "doings" of the pilot and the co-pilot on this deadly serious mission, consisted of poring over a copy of WEIRD TALES while "George," the automatic pilot, flew the plane.

Naturally we were mightily interested and pleased.

Now we'd very much like to know which issue of WEIRD TALES was along with Major Woodrow Swancutt's plane on this historic bombing operation. Perhaps he or his co-pilot, Captain Bill Harrison, Jr., or navigator Major William Adams would tell us what stories they liked best.

A free subscription is waiting for any of them if they have a chance to write us.

P. S.—We'll even welcome hearing from "George" the automatic pilot!

Here Come the Shonokins

WHEN first I wrote of John Thunstone and the Shonokins (Manly Wade Wellman confides) I referred to the rumor of a legend; well, it seems to be more than a rumor, and more than a legend.

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I have said before that John Thunstone exists—perhaps not by that name—and that, though I've romanticized him and his adventures, there exists a sound basis of factual report. But the whisper of a humanoid race of baleful magicians, who claim to have ruled America before the earliest Indian, whose external difference from man is only in the peculiar eye and the extra-long third finger, seemed fantastic enough—until the outlying readers were heard from.

On the showing of a large and lively correspondence, there are Shonokins. There must be Shonokins. Maybe more of them than I thought, or Thunstone thought. And maybe I've given them too much publicity!

Scholarly is the report of Stuart Morton Boland, San Francisco librarian and adventurer in many lands. His studies reveal that many Indian tribes, North and South America, knew and feared the Shonokins—"being like men who walk the earth as men but leave wherever they walk a place accursed."

Murray G. Thompson, of Bath, Maine, further contributes a report of his examination of pre-colonial carvings on a ledge near his home—carvinges that must be likenesses of the Shonokins and may be the work of Shonokin artists.

J. Edmond Marsengill, of Lineville, Iowa, has seen tracks in the Ozark Mountains of feet that might be human feet—except that the toe next to the little toe, analogous to the third finger of the hand, is *excessively long*, and of the makers of such tracks the Ozarkians do not care even to talk for fear of retribution."

Those Ozarkians are, perhaps, to be imitated. I don't want to encourage Russell Finger, Jr., of Camden, N. J., and others who ask how they can meet Shonokins face to face. Few, outside of Thunstone himself and his aide Kent (Crash) Collins, of Tampa, Florida, have done that and come back with a tale to tell. But let me answer some of the most frequent questions:

Shonokin is pronounced with the accent on the first syllable, to rhyme with the Scots pronunciation of "manakin." Only one settlement of Shonokins has ever been noted, the town of Araby near Zoar Valley in upstate New York, and it exists no longer.

There seem to be no female Shonokins, and very few males. If you see one at all, you're looking at a very rare creature. Mr. Marsengill, quoted above, suggests that they reproduce by budding, like certain sea creatures. A more interesting theory, into which I won't go here, is offered by Alan Dittes.

As for Thunstone himself, I have forwarded several letters to him from readers of WEIRD TALES, but I must sadly say that he never answers letters, except to his immediate and trusted friends. The nature of his work is such as to demand the utmost care in correspondence and indeed in all other behavior. But here is a last quotation, from a recent letter to him, signed Mary McFall, of Westcliffe, Colo.:

"Can you or Mr. Wellman show me a Shonokin? I think they are relatives of mine."

"Mr. Thunstone desires me to say to you, Miss McFall, that if you're even distantly related to the Shonokins he's afraid to hear so much as your name again. Thunstone fears few things, and Shonokins are among them!

Weird to Oz to Weird

THE first new Oz book since 1942 will be published September 15. So says Jack Snow, WEIRD TALES contributor and author of the new series of Oz books, founded on and continuing the famous L. Frank Baum books. Now that Jack has been transported back across the deadly desert, by Ozma's magic belt, and has temporarily laid aside his mantle of Royal Historian of Oz, we hope he will find time to again turn out some more "weird tales" for us!

READERS' VOTE

SP'WN OF THE GREEN ABYSS	LET'S PLAY "POISON"
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RHIPMATE	LIZZIE BORDEN TOOK AN AXE . . .
MAYAYA'S LITTLE GREEN MEN	FROGFATHER

Here's a list of eight stories in this issue. Won't you let us know which three you consider the best? Just place the numbers: 1, 2, and 3 respectively against your three favorite tales — then clip it out and send it to us.

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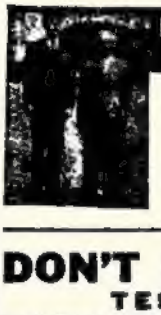

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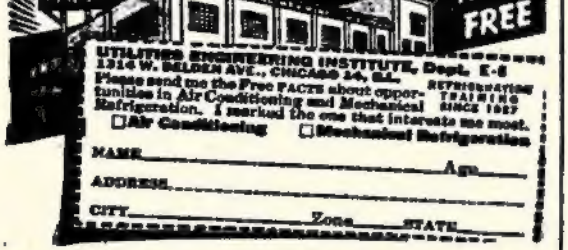

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Raymond Varney, 47 Pleasant St., Auburn, Maine
Harold W. Cheney, Jr., 584 E. Monroe St., Little Falls N. Y.
Lester Tandit, Hotel Cambridge, 1837 E. 79th St., Cleveland 3, Ohio
Mrs. Bernard Leiske, 104 Kirk Ave., Pittsburgh 10, Pa.
Larry Emmons, P. O. Box 73, Shrewsbury, N. J.
George Percival, 415 Bridge St., St. Martinville, La.
John Jones, 206 Monroe St., East Alton, Ill.
Harry Rohde, Jr., 910 N. Pulaski Rd., Chicago 51, Ill.
Terry Mercado, 820 Kelly St., Bronx, N. Y.
William Hecht, 2082 Bentley Dr., Pittsburgh, Pa.
William Hackworth, 337 3rd Ave., Ne. Moose Jaw, Sask., Can.
Mr. and Mrs. B. R. Scott, 46 Richmond St., Rochester, N. Y.
Albert Stanley Knightig, 603 Maupin Ave., Portsmouth, Va.
Frances Davis, Edinburg Trailer Ct., Edinburg, Ind.
Jerry Davis, Edinburg Trailer Ct., Edinburg, Ind.
Eileen L. Perry, 2535 Chalmers Ave., Detroit 15, Mich.
J. Warner Mills, III, P. O. Box 484, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.
Mr. Arlen E. Williams, 319 E. 100th St., New York 29 N. Y.
Robert McKeon, 2007 S. Scott St., South Bend, Ind.
Norma Wakefield, 91 N. Hartford Ave., Columbus, Ohio
Anne Burke, 710 W. 38th St., Norfolk, Va.
Virginia Wierman, 420 Baldwin, West Helena, Ark.
J. W. Farnham, 1717 No. 4th St., Minneapolis 11, Minn.
Frank Moroff, 1139 Tiffany St., Bronx 59, N. Y.
V. C. Frondoso, Lucena, Tayabas, 78 Merchat St., Philippines
Vincent C. Yager, 290 Vernon Ave., Glencoe, Illinois
Margaret M. Murtagh, 103-14 34th Ave., Corona, Queens Boro, New York

We're sorry that lack of space prevents the inclusion Margaret M. Murtagh, 103-14 34th Ave., Corona, Queens *next time.*

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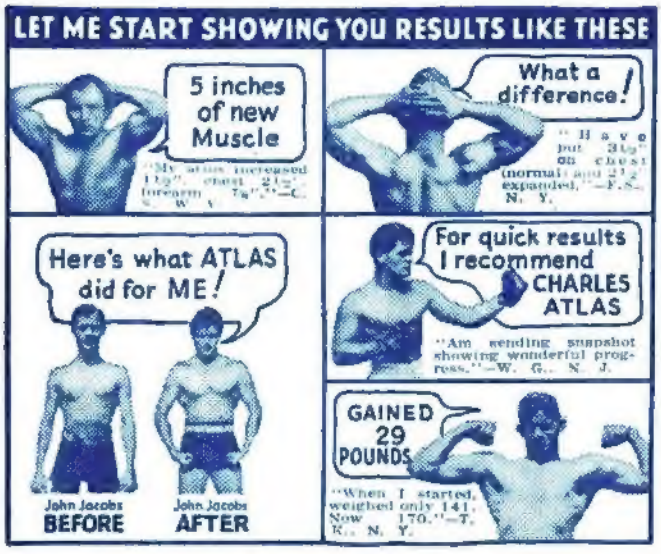

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This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas. It is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

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